

Independent Life

Winter 2007

DISABILITY *advocates*
OF KENT COUNTY

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DAKC Newbies

Agreement Reached on Bus Stop Controversy by Joe Sibley

Disability Advocates of Kent County (DAKC) played peacemaker in a situation creating a great deal of community outrage in late 2006. In November RiverTown Crossings Mall in Grandville told The Rapid to move the mall bus stop off mall property to the outer service drive. RiverTown management cited security concerns for the decision which moved the bus stop from near the Sears store (see photo) to a place hundreds of feet away from a mall entrance, making the mall inaccessible to many patrons, especially seniors and those with disabilities. Public outcry created significant media attention.



Previous Sears location

To resolve the situation, DAKC moved into action. Frank Lynn, Community Organizer, made the calls to arrange a December 12 meeting at the mall offices that included Randy Zimmerman RiverTown Crossings general manager, Peter Varga and Brian Pouget of The Rapid, and Dave Bulkowski, Frank Lynn, and Joe Sibley from DAKC and Casey Dutmer of Concerned Citizens for Improved Transportation. Mall security representatives attended the meeting as well. This dialogue resulted in a solution of a better bus stop than before the move was made, along with other changes that satisfied the mall's security concerns.

Under the new arrangement, the buses now stop at the covered south mall lower level entrance (see photo), very close to the door making it very easy for all mall patrons riding the bus to enter the mall in all weather situations. The buses will not stop at RiverTown Crossings after the mall closes which minimizes the chance for security problems. The layover at the end of route 8 was moved to the nearby Meijer bus stop. These changes took effect right away on December 18.



New covered location

"This is an ideal solution" said David Bulkowski, executive Director of Disability Advocates. "We went from an OK bus stop, to an unacceptable bus stop, to a great bus stop. This should serve as a model to other businesses to make their facilities easily accessible to those using public transit."

"We exist to advocate, assist, educate and inform on independent living options for people with disabilities and to create a barrier-free society for all."

DD Council Update

by Rob Lewakowski

As a member of the Michigan Developmental Disability Council (DD Council), each council member is asked to participate in one of five workgroups as well as one of four committees. The five workgroups are: Transportation, Housing, Education, Health, and Family Support. The four committees consist of: Public Policy, Executive, Multicultural, and the Program Committee. Over the course of the next few newsletters, a brief explanation will be given, of what each workgroup and committee does.

The Transportation Work group is comprised of representatives from state and local public transit authorities, disability advocacy organizations, and consumers. The mission of the Transportation Workgroup is to support and advocate increased availability of comprehensive transportation services that are affordable, accessible and available for people with disabilities. The workgroup identifies barriers and will recommend strategies the DD Council can use in its efforts to improve transportation options for people with disabilities statewide. The workgroup meets the second Thursday of the month.

The mission of the Public Policy Committee is to advocate for an integrated public policy for persons with disabilities, thus, enhancing the ability to be independent, productive and included fully in community life. The committee encourages networking among advocacy groups, both local and statewide, on legislation, rules and policies related to persons with disabilities. A typical meeting will consist of reviewing summaries of pending legislation and proposed administrative rules. The committee may identify and implement advocacy strategies and appropriate actions that may include: testifying at hearings, assisting in drafting position statements and contacting legislators. All positions will be consistent with the DD Council's mission statement.

The Public Policy Committee meets monthly on the second Tuesday of the month. Both the Workgroup and Committee meetings are open to all consumers.

Contact Rob Lewakowski @ ext. 226, to find out how you can become an advocate of systems change.

DAKC Awarded AT&T Excellerator Grant

AT&T recently awarded DAKC a \$25,000 Excellerator grant for technology for our Volunteer and Intern Center. Thanks to AT&T, DAKC can expand volunteer opportunities for all persons by purchasing adaptive software and other assistive technology to accommodate a wider array of disabilities. The Volunteer and Intern Center vision is to create an integrated and adaptable work environment for the many volunteers and student interns in the office. This project is a true community partnership as DAKC is working with AT&T for the technology and Steelcase for the furniture and space design. The vision is becoming a reality.

Newly Appointed!

Congratulations to DAKC staff members on their recent appointments in the community:

*David Bulkowski
The Greater Grand Rapids Home
& Builders Association Board of Directors*

*Jocelyn Dettloff
Vice-president of the Dyer Ives Foundation Board*

*Joe Sibley (AmeriCorps VISTA)
Vice-President elect-Visually Impaired Persons for Progress (VIPP) and Consumers Advisory Council for Michigan Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.*

*Christina Tilney
Kent County Friend of the Court Advisory Committee.*

*Lisa Weber (AmeriCorps VISTA)
President-elect of VIPP.*



Saturday, March 17
Catholic Central HS Gym
319 Sheldon SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
 Registration begins at 9:30 am
Call 949-1100, Ext. 237

- to register for team competition
- to receive your Walk & Roll donation envelope

Get your **FREE** Walk & Roll t-shirt by collecting donations.
 Proceeds benefit DAKC Business Services programs.

**For more information,
 go to www.dakc.us**

Restoring Hope and *Freedom*
Mary Free Bed
 Rehabilitation Hospital



J.W. Messner Inc.



The Rapid Approves Modest Millage Increase for May Ballot by David Bulkowski

On January 24, in a crowded room at Rapid Central Station, the board of the Interurban Transit Partnership (ITP) voted unanimously to place a renewal and modest increase to the Rapid's operating millage on the ballot of the six participating cities—Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming. Filling the room to support this action were many representatives of DAKC, Concerned Citizens for Improved Transportation (CCIT), Faith In Motion and others. The proposal on the May 8, 2007 ballot asks voters to approve a 1.12 millage for The Rapid which includes a renewal of the existing .95 mills, plus a .17 mill increase to fund service enhancements. The increased cost to the average homeowner will be around \$10-\$12 per year.

The service enhancements would include additional route coverage, greater connectivity, and shorter wait times. Full details of these changes for Phase I and Phase II enhancements are available at www.ridetherapid.org.

"The Rapid has kept its promises each time a millage request has been approved" said David Bulkowski, Executive Director of DAKC, and co-chair of Friends of Transit, a coalition of the transit organizations which will oversee the campaign. "Studies have shown again and again that every dollar invested in public transit brings back multiple dollars in economic development. We're ready to go to work to help to bring The Rapid to the next level".

If you support public transit in West Michigan and want more information, call 949-1100, ext. 223 or joe.s@dakc.us



Governor Signs Single Point of Entry Bill

Governor Jennifer Granholm signed the Single Point of Entry (SPE) legislation into law on December 30, 2006, enabling Michigan citizens to access information about long term care services. The SPEs will ensure that consumers and their families get the best blend of supports and services based on the consumer's preferences and needs.



Governor Jennifer Granholm,
Cyndy Viars and Clark Goodrich

The bill, currently known as Public Act 634, is based on the recommendations of the Governor's Long Term Care Task Force, the group charged with the duty to examine the State's long term care system and make recommendations to expand the reach of home and community based services, improve quality and reduce barriers to an efficient, effective system.

The Long Term Care Reform Workgroup at DAKC diligently supported this legislation since its introduction in 2005 by Representative Rick Shaffer (R-Three Rivers). The group met frequently with legislators, testified at hearings, and wrote letters to support the bill throughout the last year. At the invitation of Representative Shaffer's office, Clark Goodrich, Chairperson of the Long Term Care Reform Workgroup, and Cyndy Viars, Systems Change Facilitator at DAKC, were invited to join Governor Granholm at the Capitol at the ceremony. As both thanked the Governor for her support of long term care reform, she stated that "there is much more to be done." Currently, the Michigan Department of Community Health is working to enact policies to best support Michigan's citizens based on the recommendations of the task force.

Volunteer Appreciation: And the Award Goes To

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month. Thank you to our volunteers for their time and dedication to DAKC's mission and work in the community. We also honor two volunteers each year at our annual Holiday Open House, this year the Jim Muir Volunteer of the Year Award went to Clark Goodrich and Ken Weber. Both recipients volunteer countless hours on many levels within DAKC. We again would like to thank the two of them for their hard work. Volunteers look for your invitation in the mail to our Volunteer Appreciation Reception on Wednesday, April 25.



Dave Bulkowski presenting
Volunteer Appreciation Award
to Ken Weber

and Clark Goodrich

Thank you, Ken
and Clark!



Housing Advisory Group by Frank Lynn

An exciting new tool is available for people seeking housing in the Kent County area. The Housing Advisory Group at Disability Advocates has developed a new Housing Directory that can be accessed on line by going to www.dakc.us and clicking on the housing link. The directory has extensive information about housing issues including rental housing, financial management, advocacy groups, home ownership and home maintenance support. The rental link is divided into both subsidized and market rate sections and includes links to a number of housing locator systems. The database includes over 100,000 properties. The hope is to expand the Directory to include as many choices as possible and to include a bulletin board for consumers to use to identify housing opportunities. It is the Advisory Committee's hope that the Directory will increase housing choices for all people.

The Wyoming Housing Commission, located at 2450 36th St. SW, has opened its **PUBLIC HOUSING** waiting list until August 17, 2007 for its public housing units only. The Wyoming Housing Commission operates 196 units.

Applications will be accepted only in person, Monday through Friday from 8:00-11:30 AM and 1:00-4:00 PM.

SORRY, Section 8 applications are NOT being accepted at this time.

**949-1100 Ext. 238
Call Frank today!**

Want To Own Your Own Home?

Disability Advocates is working with NEW Development Corporation to prepare people for home ownership. NEW offers an Individual Development Account (IDA) Program to help you save for a down payment on a house. Savings are matched 3 to 1 up to the maximum of \$1000 so if you save \$1000, the match will be \$3000 for a total of \$4000 for a down payment.

Here are the program requirements:

- ✓ Agree to save at least \$20 a month from your earned income.
- ✓ Complete 6 weeks of financial management classes.
- ✓ Be willing to work on a credit repair strategy.
- ✓ Go through the application and an interview process.
- ✓ Show proof of your income that meets the income guidelines.

It's a lot of hard work and dedication, but it can help you buy the house you've always dreamed of having.

949-1100 Ext. 238



See how DAKC falls under the Disability Network Michigan umbrella. Go to www.dakc.us and look for DN/M.

Meet Berdene



In April of 2006, Berdene Shoemaker contacted DAKC wanting to improve her speaking skills, but did not qualify for speech therapy services. With a service plan designed by Berdene herself as well as core service worker Trisha Ancel-Supuk, she was able to meet her goal of improving her speaking skills.

Since reaching her first goal Berdene and Trisha have worked together to set and meet several other of Berdene's goals such as improving her spelling, counting back and understanding money, and telling time.

Berdene said, "Working with Trisha from Disability Advocates of Kent County has helped me a lot. When I talk to my friends and family everyone notices a difference in my improved speaking skill."

Since beginning to work with DAKC not only has Berdene's speaking skills, money skills, and time telling skills improved, her confidence has also risen. Berdene has taken a very active role in DAKC's Unforgettable Aktion Club serving as the vice-president.

Unforgettable Aktion Club

Since its charter night in October, The Unforgettable Aktion Club of Disability Advocates has been exactly that, unforgettable. The Aktion Club, sponsored by the Grand Rapids Kiwanis Club North as well as DAKC, is made up of young adults with a variety of disabilities, all whom have unique talents and skills to give back to the community. The service events that they have planned and carried out assisted several different populations in the Grand Rapids community

***In October**, for the Halloween season, the Unforgettable Aktion Club planned a service project that brightened the day of both the senior citizens at the Fulton Manor Holland Home and the children at St. John's Home. Members of the Aktion club delivered over 100 hand decorated Halloween bags filled with candy and games. Both the club members and the individuals whom received the bags had a great time visiting and talking with each other.*

***In December**, the Unforgettable Aktion Club members organized their own non-perishable food drive, collecting boxes of food and donating it all to God's Kitchen in Grand Rapids. In addition to that they also decided to share some holiday cheer by signing carols at the Crestview Nursing Facility on 36th Street.*

Unforgettable Aktion Club is planning their First BAKE SALE Fundraiser! Meetings are held the fourth Tuesday of the month from 5:30pm-6:30pm at DAKC.

You are welcome to join us on

Tuesday, March 27

5:30pm-6:30pm.

For more details
949-1100, Ext 235
trisha.a@dakc.us



UnforgettableAktion Club

ZeroStep Advisory Committee Meets

ZeroStep held its first Advisory Committee meeting January 24th. Architects, builders, a realtor and marketing professionals contributed valuable insights from their various perspectives on ZeroStep's strategic business plan and tactics. They will periodically meet to evaluate, assist and guide the ZeroStep team as it pursues its mission of providing comprehensive home design solutions that enhance all stages of life.

Committee Members

<i>Ricardo Anselmo, AIA</i>	<i>Anselmo & Associates –Architecture and Interior Design</i>
<i>Pat DeBoer</i>	<i>DeBoer Realty</i>
<i>Kline Kauramaki</i>	<i>J.W. Messner--Integrated Marketing Communications</i>
<i>Rich Kogelschatz</i>	<i>Heartland Builders</i>
<i>Mike Murphy</i>	<i>J.W. Messner</i>
<i>Tracy Schondelmayer</i>	<i>J.W. Messner</i>
<i>Jim Stortz</i>	<i>Eastbrook Homes</i>
<i>Jeff VandenBosch, AIA</i>	<i>ErgoQuest, Inc.</i>



www.zerostep.org

DAKC Newbies!

Mary K. St. John
ZeroStep Team
AmeriCorps VISTA

Mary K. was born in Grand Rapids but goes back and forth to Arkansas where her family originates. She has 3 children and two grandchildren. Mary says "I am thankful that my life has and always will be wrapped around the medical field. My goal in life is to be helpful to all people."

Kimberly Royster
Cooley Law Student Extern

Kim is originally from Grand Rapids and currently working with Business Services at DAKC. She will graduate from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in May of 2007 earning her Juris Doctrate with a concentration in Business Transactions. Kim has been active in community sevicees while in law school and hopes to continue serving the community after she graduates. Kim is especially interested in working with disabled veterans and hopes to practice corporate law and estate planning after graduation.

Anabel Nunez
Business Services Team
AmeriCorps VISTA

Originally from Mexico, Anabel now lives in Grand Rapids. She is married and has a son whom she loves to play with in her free time. Anabel has an Associate's degree from Grand Rapids Community College and is currently working on her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at the University of Phoenix. She is also an AmeriCorps VISTA and will work in community resource development.

Liz Chockley
Grand Valley State University Intern

Liz is an advertising and public relations student at Grand Valley State University, originally from Rochester Hills, MI . As an intern at DAKC, she will be contacting community organizations to determine how best to collaborate and develop resource information for our mutual customers. After graduating in April, Liz plans on working in the communications field for a non-profit organization such as hospice. Liz likes to travel and write children's books.

Correspondence

Disability Advocates of Kent County welcomes your comments, suggestions, and questions about its newsletter, *Independent Life*. Letters to the Editor and all other correspondence can be directed to: Editor, *Independent Life*, 3600 Camelot Drive SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546 or e-mail cindy.w@dakc.us

Disclaimer

Independent Life is designed to inform people with disabilities and other interested parties of disability related issues and other matters deemed relevant to persons with disabilities. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Disability Advocates of Kent County.

Display and Sponsorship Information

For information on display in or sponsorship of in *Independent Life*, contact Disability Advocates of Kent County at (616) 949-1100, Extension 222.

Story Submission Information

Disability Advocates of Kent County welcomes the submission of materials for publication in its newsletter, *Independent Life*. Materials submitted for publication cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Submission of such materials does not imply acceptance for publication, and *Independent Life* reserves the right to edit all materials chosen for publication. *Independent Life* cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited materials.

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Anabel Nunez
Joe Sibley
Mary K. St. John
Lisa Weber

Our Mission-

"We exist to advocate, assist, educate and inform on independent living options for people with disabilities and to create a barrier-free society for all."



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