

# AccessLetter

Cambridge Commission for  
Persons with Disabilities

## Emergency Preparedness: Not the Flavor of the Month



“One of the most devastating aspects of Hurricane Katrina was that most of the stranded victims were society’s most vulnerable members - low income families, the elderly, the homeless, and Americans with disabilities. Too many states and cities do not have adequate plans in place to care for special-needs populations.”

These words, from President Barack Obama, relate to the new administration’s “Commitment to Accessibility,” a pledge which will certainly be challenged to the utmost in the next few years. Of course, no one knows that better than President Obama, as his agenda focuses on righting our beleaguered economy.

With so many drowning in the economy, few people are worrying about the next flood or hurricane or pandemic. You don’t need to be a person with a disability to want to look away from another Katrina or duck an outbreak of Bird Flu. And let’s not even consider the impact of a 9-11 redux.

But if you do have a disability and have chosen to live independently in the community, away from family and institutional care, you really can’t afford to look away. Consequences of a catastrophe in 2009 could equal or surpass what happened to New Orleans in 2005.

However much you might want to join the nondisabled world in remaining unprepared for a disaster, you can’t ignore your vulnerability. Even more, the very essence of what independence in the community means will be tested to its core.

**(More on Emergency Prep, page 2)**

## Affordable, Accessible Recreation in Cambridge

Tired of clubs with long contracts and high membership fees? Looking for a gym or pool close to work? Want a place where you can also take your children? Need assistance getting in and out of the pool? Check out the newly renovated Cambridge War Memorial Recreation Center at 1640 Cambridge Street, between Harvard and Inman Squares.

Inside this beautiful, *fully accessible*, climate controlled facility you will find a:

- Swim center with 3 pools
- Gym with a regulation-size basketball court
- Weight room with state-of-the-art fitness equipment
- Field house with an indoor track, volleyball, basketball, and indoor tennis courts
- Multipurpose room for yoga, exercise classes and Pilates.



The swim center has three pools, including a 12 foot deep diving tank with one board, a 75’ lap pool with six lanes, and a round 3 ½’ deep instruction pool which is kept at 84 degrees.

Lifeguards are always present. Two new power lifts can be positioned beside each of the pools to help any individual with a mobility impairment in and out of the water.

Sandy Durmaskin, who uses a walker, said “The whole atmosphere is attractive and inviting. The floor grade is level and clear; the mobile lift feels safe to use. The life guard and instructors are very helpful and well trained in using the equipment.”

**(More on War Memorial, page 3)**

## Emergency Prep (cont'd)

Jack Grieco uses a wheelchair. He's been living independently for years and currently lives in a high-rise building in Boston. Grieco anticipates having to make a terrible decision some day.

"Faced with an impending emergency," he says, "Am I going to evacuate or stay?"

Grieco rattles off some of the consequences for those who manage their own care but who are at the mercy of a support system which could too easily fail.

"No electricity. No elevators. No medication. And no PCAs (personal care attendants), if the T is out and there's no way to get to me, or no way to communicate. Or I could be stuck in my wheelchair, with who-knows-how-many others in one of the evacuation routes around my building."

But if he stayed? Maybe a bottle of scotch while he lives out his fate.

A grim scenario, of course. But not inevitable. And perhaps, not without hope.

One Massachusetts nonprofit that has been confronting issues around emergency preparedness and people with disabilities is the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC). DPC consists of disability rights activists seeking equal opportunities for all individuals with disabilities. Bill Allan, DPC's executive director, describes his organization's efforts to get government emergency preparedness officials to recognize and incorporate the needs of the disability community since 2003. "The response has always been inadequate," he says, "Incomplete and uncoordinated."

Allan writes (on the DPC website) about "attending a meeting on pandemic flu called by Governor [Patrick] with the U.S. Secretary of Health & Human Services present. There wasn't a single person in the Convention Center with a visible disability. A letter to the Department of Public Health's staff coordinator volunteering the Disability Policy Consortium's resources was met with a perfunctory answer."

Since then, DPC has sued MEMA for its alleged lack of communication and cooperation when DPC tried to

find and circulate a list of emergency shelters around the state. DPC has also developed a guide called the "Personal Emergency Preparedness Plan," which, among other things, facilitates planning and communication between people with disabilities and their caretakers.

But given the current impact of the economy on government and on services for people with disabilities, DPC remains concerned about whether consumers hoping to manage their own care in an emergency will be able to get the help they need.

A different perspective on this, however, comes from the Massachusetts Office on Disability. "I don't agree that government interest and attention in Massachusetts has fallen off," says Myra Berloff, Director of the MOD. "Although there are certainly less resources, there continues to be funding to continue our efforts in emergency preparedness for people with disabilities."

"I realize with all the bleak news surrounding the economy, one would expect all of state government's efforts could be directed solely at the issue of turning our economy around" said Berloff. "However, the work of state government is continuing - to the best of all our ability and the work of emergency preparedness in Massachusetts is most certainly including the needs of people with disabilities."

Berloff goes on to cite funding which may address some of advocates' concerns. "The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security recently awarded a third round of grants to MOD to conduct outreach into the disability community regarding personal emergency preparedness. There is an emphasis on outreaching into communities of people who live in high rise buildings. MOD is continuing to conduct our smaller personal preparedness sessions as well."

Berloff is also adamant about the Commonwealth standing by the disability community. "The various committees convened by MEMA, charged with strategic planning for emergency preparedness continue, at every meeting, to vocally include the needs of people with disabilities... To my knowledge no planning is taking place that does not include the specific needs of people with disabilities. MEMA hired and has retained during the economic downturn

an Access and Inclusion Planner, who participates in every one of these planning sessions.”

Advocates and state agency officials do agree that consumer involvement is critical. Allan advises people with disabilities, “Ask questions of yourself. Become more involved. Volunteer. Your perspective is an important one to share. When it comes to people with disabilities, we can assume members of our communities know much more about our needs than most other people.”

“More than ever,” Grieco believes, “Emergency preparedness should be now.”

### Emergency Preparedness Resources

Disability Policy Consortium: <[www.dpcma.org](http://www.dpcma.org)>

Mass. Emergency Management Agency:

<[www.mass.gov/mema](http://www.mass.gov/mema)>

Mass. Office on Disability: <[www.mass.gov/mod](http://www.mass.gov/mod)>

--Bobby Vilinsky

## War Memorial (cont'd)

Durmaskin continued, “They are also good at adapting exercises or suggesting variations to accommodate individual abilities. I really appreciate these changes. They make it possible for everyone to participate.”

There is a wheelchair accessible shower and changing space in both the Men’s and Women’s locker rooms as well as three separate wheelchair accessible Family shower/changing rooms. These are spacious and great for parents with kids of the opposite sex or for a person with disability and his/her personal care attendant.

The War Memorial facility was built in 1957 as a tribute to soldiers from Cambridge who died in wars from the American Revolution through the present. When you are at the Center for a swim session or a class, take a turn through the beautifully restored Memorial Hall on the second floor. The elegant atmosphere is a fitting tribute to the men and women

remembered there. “Until the bronze recessed ceiling, fixtures, and skylights were cleaned, I had no idea it was so beautiful,” remarked Donna Cameron, Recreation Activities Manager.

Located at 1640 Cambridge Street, the War Memorial Recreation Center is near the intersections of Roberts Road and Trowbridge Street. While it is adjacent to the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, the Recreation Center has its own entrance for use by the general public. Except for some mid-afternoon senior classes, the Center is open Monday – Friday, 5:30 – 9:15 pm, and Saturday – Sunday, 2-5 pm for the public. Other times during the week the Center is used for children’s classes and by the high school students.

There is a new program for each season, and classes generally run from six to ten weeks. Registration opens on March 9 for the spring classes that will begin the first week of April. For a copy of the Program Book that lists all of the classes, call 617-349-6279 voice, 617-492-0235 TTY or view it online at <[www.cambridgema.gov/dhsp2/open.cfm](http://www.cambridgema.gov/dhsp2/open.cfm)>. To reach Donna Cameron, Recreation Activities

Manager, call 617-349-6237 or email <[dcameron@cambridgema.gov](mailto:dcameron@cambridgema.gov)>.

People who do not live in Cambridge pay slightly higher fees than residents of the city, except for Cambridge city employees who are charged the same fees as residents. Fees for just using the pools, weight and cardio rooms (not classes) are further broken down by age.

There are significant savings for seniors age 60 and over, and these rates are also available to individuals with disabilities with proper documentation.



Accessible Shower at War Memorial

## Free Help with Tax Returns

Volunteer assistance in preparing your 2008 Tax Returns is available at several locations in the Cambridge/Somerville area. Access to free IRS-supported programs is not geographically restricted; these and other VITA programs may serve residents from any community.

To receive assistance, taxpayers should bring valid identification and come prepared with all necessary information about the people in their household, income, and expenses. Here are the locations; call for information regarding days, hours and appointments.

**CEOC (Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee)** - 11 Inman St. in Central Square, 617-868-2900. VITA-trained staff are available by appointment. Assistance is mainly for persons with disabilities, elders, and persons with limited income. Bilingual assistance is available in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Kreyol.

**National Student Partnerships** – locations in Cambridge and Somerville:

**Multi Service Center**, 19 Brookline Street, 617-349-6338, in Central Square, Cambridge

**East End House**, 105 Spring Street; 617-876-4444 in East Cambridge

**Community Learning Center** - Computer Lab, located at 19-R Brookline Street, Central Square, Cambridge (*Note:* Entrance to 19R is in the back of building - enter through parking lot on Green Street.) 617-349-6363

**Family Center**, 366 Somerville Avenue, 617-591-9400 in Union Square. Somerville. Assistance will be provided in English, Spanish, and, on a *limited basis*, in Portuguese.

When calling to make an appointment, be sure to check to make sure your language can be spoken by a tax preparer.

## Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- March 3 & 5 **MDDA (Manic Depression & Depressive Association) Support Group** at Mass. General Hospital meets every Tuesday and Thursday, 7 to 9 p.m. on the 4th floor in the Yawkey Building. Follow the signs. Meetings are free and open to public. For more information call 617-855-2795.
- March 4 **Annual Legislative Reception at State House** – Sponsored by the Arc and Mass. Developmental Disabilities, this is a time to rally with other consumers. Meet at the Grand Staircase at 10 am for presentations, and then make visits to legislative offices.
- March 4 **Senior Support Group for caregivers over 60** – meets monthly at the Family Resource Center, 20 Gould Street in Reading, 10 am - 12 noon on Wednesdays. Share and learn with other seniors who have adult family members with developmental disabilities. For more information contact Michelle Faugno at <fam2fam@thearc.org> or Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change, 16 Warwick Road, Melrose, MA 02176.
- March 4 **Injured Worker Support Meetings** – (*previously listed as RSI – repetitive strain injury*) Meetings will now scheduled by appointment, often the first Wednesday of each month, 5:15 - 6:45 pm; call RSI Action at 617-247-6827 to set up a meeting. Meetings/appointments usually take place at 650 Beacon Street, Kenmore Square, Boston, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, near Kenmore Square. Volunteers provide resources and support. For more information, call 617-247-6827, or go to <www.rsiaction.org>.
- March 4 **Weekly support group for adults with LD/ADHD** (learning disabilities & attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) meets in Cambridge near Harvard Square, 6-7:30 p.m. every Wednesday. If you are interested, contact Angelica Sawyer at 617- 661-3117.
- March 11 & 25 **Manic Depression & Depressive Association (MDDA) Bipolar Support Group** meets every Wednesday evening, 7 - 9 p.m. at McLean Hospital in Belmont (Demarneffe Building, 1st floor lobby). Includes a lecture on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays. Call 617-855-3665 for more information.
- March 4 **NAMI Connection** – a support group for adults with mental illness, meets every Wednesday evening, 7- 8:30 pm at Cambridge Hospital, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Learning Center rooms C & D. The group is **free** and open to all who self-identify as having a mental illness, regardless of diagnosis. For more information, contact Carter at 617-776-7972 or <stbosal@arczip.com>.

- March 6 **Public Hearing on Accessible Voting Machines for non-federal elections** – 10:00 AM at One Ashburton Place, Room 1705 in Boston. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) only requires these machines to be used for federal elections. The accessible machines were paid for with money the State received through HAVA, but the municipalities have to pay the cost involved to program them for each election. To avoid this expense, many cities and towns do not want to use them for local elections. Voice your right to vote independently. Come to the Hearing or send written testimony to the Secretary of State in care of Michelle Tassinari, Director, Elections Division, 1 Ashburton Place, 17th floor, Boston, MA 02108 or email <Michelle.Tassinari@state.ma.us>.
- March 8 **Art of the Ancient World** – This is one of the *Introductory Feeling for Form* tours of the permanent collections at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) for blind and low vision people. Each monthly session focuses on a different collection and will include wayfinding and verbal description of spaces. The Museum is committed to making both its buildings and programs accessible to visitors with disabilities. For more information, contact Valarie Burrows at 617-369-3302 or <access@mfa.org> or visit <www.mfa.org>. The MFA can be reached via the MBTA Green Line to MFA bus stop, or Orange Line to Ruggles Station and walk to Museum Road.
- March 10 **Boston Voice Users is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software.** They meet 7:30 – 9:30 pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at MIT in Building 2, Rm.135. To find out more about meetings and discussions go to <www.bostonvoiceusers.org>.
- March 12 **MBTA Senior Pass Workshop** – Get information and complete your application for a Senior or Disability Transportation Access (TAP) identification card at the Cambridge Citywide Senior Center and save a trip to Downtown Crossing or Back Bay. MBTA staff will be available to take pictures and process your application from 1 to 4 pm. The completed card will then be mailed to you. You can use the card to purchase reduced fares on the MBTA bus and subway system. Cards are available to seniors age 65+ and to individuals with documented disabilities. For more information, contact the MBTA's Office for Transportation Access at Back Bay Station, 617-222-5976 voice or 617-222-5854 TTY or <www.mbta.com/fares\_and\_passes/reduced\_fare\_programs/>. The Citywide Senior Center is at 806 Massachusetts Ave. in Cambridge.
- March 12 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.
- March 13 **BCIL Marie Felton Award Ceremony** – Give support to Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) by attending their 13<sup>th</sup> annual gala and fund raiser at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel, 138 St. James Ave. in Boston, 6 - 9 pm. 2009 honorees are Mary Lou Maloney, Courtland Townes III, and the 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. Single tickets are \$150, for consumers and clients \$50. For reservations or to purchase ads in the program book, contact David Sternburg at 617-338-6665, x223 or <dsternburg@bostoncil.org.>
- March 14 **Visions of Community: Conference for Professionals and Families of Children with Special Needs** at Seaport/World Trade Center-Boston, 7:30 am – 5 pm. The conference features information covering Early Childhood, Special Education, No Child Left Behind, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Spanish, Portuguese, and Cantonese translation is available. **Registration fee is \$85 per person.** For more information, contact FCSN at 617-236-7210 or 800-331-0688 or check the website at <www.fcsn.org>.
- March 17 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) meeting** 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1.
- March 19 **Autism Support Group** – meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Central Square Branch of Cambridge Public Library, 45 Pearl Street in Cambridge. For more information contact Lorraine Iacopucci at <liacopucci@nsarc.org> or 978-624-2304.
- March 20 **Cross-Cultural, Cross-Disability Exchange Program for Youth in Costa Rica**, DEADLINE for Applications – Spend 16 days (June 26 – July 10) with Mobility International developing leadership skills,

learning Spanish, and sharing disability perspectives with eleven other 18-24 year olds. Generous scholarships are available to qualified applicants, but participants are expected to pay a minimum of \$220 toward the program fees. For more information, contact Mobility International at 541-343-1294 voice/TTY or <exchange@miusa.org> or <www.miusa.org>.

- March 25 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** meets 1 to 3 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, 2nd floor Conference Room #2. Call 617-973-7507 voice, or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or request interpreters. Security measures require proper ID for access to meetings.
- March 28 **American Sign Language Tour of “Titian, Tintoretto & Veronese” exhibit at the MFA** – Tickets for this 1:00 pm tour are limited, email [access@mfa.org](mailto:access@mfa.org) to pre-register. The masterpieces in this new exhibit, “Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice,” (March 16 – August 16) reveal the intense competition that formed the Venetian style. While you are there, check out *Mad on Color: Paintings of Nineteenth-century Venice* where works by Renoir, Monet, and Whistler show the influence of Venice on the Impressionists. For more information, contact Valarie Burrows at 617-369-3302 or <access@mfa.org> or visit <www.mfa.org>. The MFA can be reached via the MBTA Green Line to MFA bus stop, or Orange Line to Ruggles Station and walk to Museum Road.
- April 12 **Art of Asia** – This is one of the *Introductory Feeling for Form* tours of the permanent collections at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston for blind and low vision people. See March 8 listing for more information and directions.
- April 16 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment. (The meeting this month is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday because April 9 is a religious holiday.)
- April 21 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) meeting** 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1.
- April 22 **American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreted Family Vacation Week Activities at the Museum of Fine Arts** in Boston. For more information, contact Valarie Burrows at 617-369-3302 or <access@mfa.org> or visit <www.mfa.org>.
- April 22 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** meets 1 to 3 p.m. See March 25 listing for details.
- April 26 **American Sign Language Tours of *Art In Bloom* exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA)** will be given at two different times. Celebrate spring at this annual festival of fine art and fresh flowers! See the MFA’s galleries transformed by fifty extraordinary arrangements inspired by magnificent works of art— from Asian sculptures to world-renowned European paintings. For more information and times, contact Valarie Burrows at 617-369-3302 or <access@mfa.org> or visit <www.mfa.org>.
- April 30 **International Juried Exhibition by Artists with Disabilities DEADLINE** for entries – *Revealing Culture* exhibit may include but is not limited to two and three-dimensional art, crafts (jewelry, textile, glass), digital art, installations, and time-based media (video, film). Winning pieces will be on display in Washington, D.C. during June 2010. For more information go to <www.vsarts.org> or <www.vsartsfestival.org> or call 800-933-8721 voice, 202-737-0645 TTY.
- May 1 **35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala for Federation for Children with Special Needs** – at Seaport Hotel in Boston, 6 – 10 pm. Master of Ceremonies is Angela Peri, Owner and Founder of Boston Casting; entertainment by the Haggerty Chimes Ensemble of the Haggerty School in Cambridge and *Tough Love Trio* and a silent auction featuring fabulous restaurants, hotels and sports memorabilia. Individual tickets are \$150; sponsor a table for \$2000. Call Selena Sheaves at 617-236-7210 or visit <[http://fcsn.org/giving\\_events/gala\\_09.php](http://fcsn.org/giving_events/gala_09.php)> to purchase tickets or become a sponsor.
- May 9 **Art of Europe** – This is one of the *Introductory Feeling for Form* tours of the permanent collections at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston for blind and low vision people. See March 8 listing for more information and directions
- May 14 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.
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## Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

The Commission was established in 1979 to act as a clearinghouse on disability and access issues throughout the City of Cambridge. We strive to raise awareness of disability matters, to eliminate discrimination, and to promote equal opportunity for people with all types of disabilities – physical, mental and sensory. The Commission provides information, referral, guidance, and technical assistance to individuals and their families, employers, public agencies, businesses and private non-profit organizations.

The goal of our 11-member citizen advisory board, comprised primarily of individuals with disabilities, is to maximize access to all aspects of Cambridge community life. Our regularly scheduled Commission meetings, which always include an opportunity for public comment, are held at 5:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month.

**Access Notice:** The City of Cambridge and Commission for Persons with Disabilities do not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in e-mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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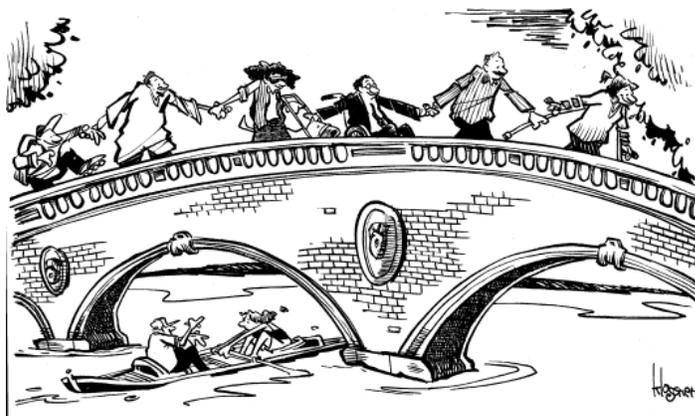
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We welcome your articles, comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Write us!

**Read past issues on our website: [www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm](http://www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm)**

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**Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities**

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