

AccessLetter

Cambridge Commission for
Persons with Disabilities

15th Anniversary of the ADA: Promises and Struggles

Fifteen years ago the world was still celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall and the international freedom that symbolized. So on July 26, 1990 when President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), he likened it to the dismantling of "...another wall, one which has, for too many generations, separated Americans with disabilities from the freedom they could glimpse, but not grasp. Once again, we rejoice as this barrier falls, proclaiming together we will not accept, we will not excuse, we will not tolerate discrimination in America... Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down." (*Former President George H. W. Bush*)

Fred Fay, longtime disability advocate and cofounder of Justice for All, an online disability rights journal <www.jfanow.org>, had this to say about the impact of the ADA over the last decade and a half:

"While I have been discouraged by some of the Supreme Court rulings that have scaled back the full scope of the ADA, when I look at all the changes that have been made, at all the cases that the Justice Department and others have settled in the past 15 years, it is truly amazing to me how much progress has been made.

Perhaps the biggest change that has happened in the lives of people with disabilities is the change in self-image. A generation ago, people with disabilities grew up hearing from every corner that they were less human, that they should be 'out of sight, out of mind', or even that they should be incarcerated in institutions. Well, if you grow up in that kind of a society, it's very hard to have a positive self-image, since most people live up to the expectations of those around them. If all you hear is negative attitudes and

low expectations, these become a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, today young people with disabilities grow up hearing that they have rights and equal opportunity to become part of society. People with disabilities therefore now have a more positive self-image; this makes it easier to have high expectations for ourselves and to achieve a lot more."

The following quotes from others involved in the passage and celebration of this landmark civil rights legislation convey the mood of that day and the hopes for the future. Senator Orrin Hatch said, "Congress has sent a clear message across this country – individuals with disabilities, no less than other Americans, are entitled to an equal

opportunity to participate in the American dream. That dream can now become a reality." Senator Ted Kennedy called the ADA "in a sense, an emancipation

proclamation for the disabled. And America will be better, fairer, and a stronger nation because of it."

"From now on, Americans with disabilities will be treated as first-class citizens.... With the passage of the ADA, we as a Nation make a pledge that every person with a disability will have the opportunity to maximize his or her potential and to live... in the mainstream of our society," declared Senator Tom Harkin. "This bill offers us a chance to say no to injustice... We all know the fight for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was long and hard. The triumph was great, but the struggle is not over. There is more work to be done and the ADA represents an important step," remarked the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Attorney General Dick Thornburgh noted that, "Passage of the ADA was truly a cooperative effort between the Congress and the Administration, under the leadership of President George [H.W.] Bush... I am especially pleased

Americans with Disabilities Act

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1990 - 2005



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that the Department of Justice was able to contribute to the passage of the ADA. As a parent of a disabled child... I have witnessed the many faces of discrimination confronting persons with disabilities... The elimination of these barriers – attitudinal, architectural, and communications barriers – will enable all of us to benefit from the skills and talents of persons with disabilities... Only if we all work together can we ensure that the promises made by the ADA become a reality for all persons with disabilities in this country.”

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Public Law 101-336, truly did have an extraordinarily broad base of support. For the first time in history people with all types of disabilities, worked shoulder to shoulder with their families and friends to create an effective coalition to shape social reform. In the halls of government, the ADA was a model of bipartisanship, supported by a vote of 377 to 28 in the House of Representatives and 91 to 6 in the Senate. Congressional committees were equally united in their backing of the legislation. Such overwhelming approval of a measure could only occur with both Republican and Democratic support.

So where are we today, fifteen years later? Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, leader in the National Federation of the Blind, noted in 1990, “The law is just the beginning. It is a framework for the future. The barriers of social prejudice will only crumble as we work to make the rights provided by the law a reality in our everyday lives and [in] our hearts.” And the man sometimes referred to as the father of the ADA – Justin Dart – said “The Americans with Disabilities Act is a landmark victory for human justice. But we are still far from the promised land of equality and empowerment in every day life. We will do well to recall that most initially successful revolutions have been frustrated by apathy and disunity.”

A December 2004 report by the National Council on Disability <www.ncd.gov> says that in a variety of ways the ADA has lived up the hopes that accompanied its passage. The provisions that address architectural, transportation, and communication accessibility have changed the face of American society in numerous concrete ways. Other provisions have eliminated many discriminatory practices by private businesses and government agencies. The ADA proved to be the principal civil rights law protecting people with HIV from discriminatory actions directed at them. While it has begun

to change the social fabric of our nation, there are still huge gaps in enforcement.

MBTA Introduces Automated Fare Collection System

You may have recently heard about the new fare collection system that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is installing. Eventually everyone will be using smart cards just like riders in Washington D.C., New York City and London, and the old MBTA token will be a thing of the past. These new smart cards that have a magnetic strip are sometimes called “Charlie Cards” or “Charlie Tickets.”

There will be new fare vending machines with “touch” screens where you can purchase a smart card or ticket with cash or a credit or debit card. You can put as much value on the smart card or ticket as you like – anything from a \$1.25 one-way fare to the cost of a weekly or monthly pass. Riding the subway or bus with these new cards is easy. You insert the smart card in the slot or tap it on the black “target” when you board. The cost of the fare is automatically subtracted from the balance on your card.

When will all this happen? The Airport and Aquarium stations on the Blue Line were converted to the new fare collection system in May and installation of the new equipment is planned for six additional Blue Line stations throughout the summer. The conversion of the Orange, Red and Green lines will begin in the fall of 2005 and will continue through 2006. The Green Line and bus fleets will be done last.

Will there still be reduced fares for seniors (age 65 and older) and individuals with disabilities? Yes, the reduced fare of 35¢ at most subway stations and 25¢ on buses is still in effect for individuals with a MBTA Senior ID or Transportation Access Program (TAP) card.

If you are a senior or a person with a disability with one of these cards you will be able to buy reduced fare tickets and monthly passes at these new vending machines. When you board you will need to use the wheelchair accessible / reduced fare gate in the subway stations.

Can Seniors and people with disabilities still use their old ID cards for reduced fares? With the installation of these new smart card fare vending machines seniors and individuals with disabilities who are eligible for reduced fares will need to get *new* identification cards. The Senior

Citizen ID and the Transportation Access Program (TAP) cards for people with disabilities will be replaced by new cards that combine the old ID with the new smart card technology. Cash value can be stored on this new ID card at the reduced fare rate. As the cash value is used up more value can be purchased and added to the card at the vending machines.

How do I get one of these new Senior or TAP identification cards? If you currently have a Senior ID or TAP card you can *swap* it for a new one at no charge at the Reduced Fare ID Replacement Center on the Downtown Crossing Concourse between the Red and Orange lines. MBTA staff there will take your picture and issue you a Temporary Permit. They will send you your new Senior ID or TAP card in the mail in a few weeks.

If you do not currently have a Senior ID you can apply for one at the MBTA Office for Transportation Access at Back Bay Station. It will cost 50¢ and you will need to take some documentation that shows proof of your age (65+). Individuals with disabilities who do not currently have a TAP card or have one that has expired will need to complete the application process. Applications are available on the web at: www.mbta.com/traveling_t/disability_pwd.asp or from the Downtown Crossing and Back Bay locations, or by calling the Office of Transportation Access at 617-222-5976 voice or 617-222-5854 TTY. Once your application has been approved and you pay the \$3 fee, staff at the Back Bay Station will take your picture and issue you a Temporary Permit. They will send you your new Senior ID or TAP card in the mail in a few weeks.

MBTA staff will also visit various towns to take ID photos and help with this process, beginning this summer in areas (Saugus, Everett, East Boston, Revere, Winthrop and Chelsea) served by the Blue Line. Watch for announcements about when they will be in a town near you later this year. They will set up tables for a day or two at Senior Centers throughout the Boston area to help

process applications for seniors and people with disabilities.

When can I start using my new Temporary Permit? When you get your new Temporary Permit you can use it at all MBTA stations even if the new fare collection equipment has not yet been installed. Just show your new Temporary Permit to the station collector or bus driver and pay with cash or use your reduced fare monthly pass as you have been doing all along. For more information contact the MBTA at 617-222-3200 or check their web site at www.mbta.com.

TV's *House MD*: Does the Moody Disabled Doctor Help Us or Hurt Us?

Eager critics have named TV's brilliant diagnostic sleuth, Dr. Gregory House, MD – played against type by British comic actor Hugh Laurie (*Stuart Little*, *Sense & Sensibility*, *Jeeves & Wooster*) – “the breakthrough character of the season.” In June, *TV Guide* gave him their cover, and Internet polls voted him “TV's sexiest doctor.” Laurie is favored to win this September's “Emmy” for best actor.

In its first season, the drama series *House MD* gained momentum slowly, until it moved to a new time slot in January (Tuesday evenings at 9 p.m. on Fox 25). Once the gritty, witty series began to get the attention it deserved, its viewer-ship tripled, making *House* a prime-time

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phenomenon. The show is in re-runs through August and a DVD of season's shows will be released at the end of the summer.

Each episode hangs on the arrival in hospital of a patient with an undiagnosed, potentially fatal medical predicament. Dr House leads four younger physicians through a labyrinth of medical facts and elusive human factors, as they guess at, and test for, various diseases, infections, or toxicities that may be killing their patient.

An expert detective, Dr. House is just as notorious for his withdrawn, suspicious attitude about people, his outspoken sarcasm and harsh wit, and his adolescent resistance to authority. Dressed like a rumpled prep school slacker and usually unshaven, Dr. House also lives with intense chronic pain. He is unable to bear weight on his right leg, he leans heavily on his cane, openly consumes pain pills, and is obviously disabled.

But viewers can see beneath the quirks a passionate healer and philosopher who provokes those around him to greater awareness. Kudos to Mr. Laurie for taking the role of such a complex character, knowing we'd have to get to know the doctor over time if we were ever to love (or even like) him.

In the pilot episode, Dr. House complains to a friend that hospital visitors assume he is a patient rather than a doctor – of course, he refuses to wear a white coat like other TV doctors. When he says, "People don't want a sick doctor," is this his own feeling, or is he mocking what others think? And should we assume the audience knows the difference between having a disability and being "sick"? How important is Dr. House's disability? What is its meaning? Would the show be just as compelling without it?

The demands of his disability are obvious to his fellow doctors, who make the effort not to confuse that with his already-difficult personality. Fortunately, the show repeatedly makes clear this was his nature before he became disabled.



***House MD* star Hugh Laurie**

Near the end of the season, we are given the gripping story of how Dr. House became disabled after an un-diagnosed clot caused extensive nerve and muscle death in his thigh. There, in the initial agony of that injury, Greg House's conviction is clear: he says he would prefer to die than to survive with a disability. But the reasons behind his feelings are not clear at all, leaving much for us to speculate about.

Is Dr. House a role model for viewers, in his independence, humor, and determination? Or does he merely represent a fresh take by non-disabled writers on

the "wounded healer" archetype – the brilliant diagnostician who hides his caring behind intellect and wit?

Unfortunately, Dr. House is portrayed as angry and unresolved about medical decisions made on his behalf, years past. But beyond his battle with pain, we see nothing of his current attitude about his disability.

The otherwise superbly written series relies on a physician consultant to make sure all the medical action and dialogue make sense. Maybe for Season II, it could engage some writers who are versed in disability culture.

That way *House* can still entertain us while remaining true to what many of us know about living with disability – and what prime time, perhaps, has yet to learn.

Catch *House MD* on Fox's cable Channel 25, Tuesday evenings at 9 pm. And let us know what you think of the show from the disability perspective.

by Bet MacArthur, <artsanalys@aol.com>

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- July 1 – 30 **Gateway Summer Sale** – 25% or more off every item in the Gateway Crafts Store, 60 Harvard Street in Brookline Village. Gateway Arts is a Vinfen sponsored program that provides studio and gallery space plus a sales shop for artists with disabilities. Hours are 11-6 Monday – Friday, and noon – 5 on Saturday.
- July 6 **Weekly Support Group for Adults with Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder** will meet at Christ Church in Cambridge, 6-7:30 p.m. from July 6 through August 10. It is FREE but you need to contact Angelica Sawyer of College Bound to register, 617-661-3117 voice or 617-497-5257 fax. The address is Zero Garden Street; this is the gray wood Episcopal church on the far side of the Old Burying Ground if you are walking from Harvard Square. The group will meet in the Library of the Parish House, which is wheelchair accessible. The group is sponsored in part by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC).
- July 6 **RSI (repetitive strain injury) Monthly Drop-in Support & Information Meeting** (no registration is necessary) on first Wednesday of each month, 6-8 p.m. Be sure to arrive before 7 p.m. when the lobby door is locked. New location: 650 Beacon Street in Boston, 4th floor Conference Room, just steps from the MBTA station in Kenmore Square. RSI Action volunteers will answer questions and provide resources and support, including the opportunity to view our provider evaluation book. For more information, call 617-247-6827, check web at <www.rsiaction.org> or email <cnot@rsiaction.org> and include your phone number so you can be informed of any last-minute changes to the date or location.
- July 8 **DEADLINE to participate in Injured Workers Survey** developed by MassCOSH to document challenges that injured workers face regarding workers compensation benefits and access to medical care. You can participate anonymously. To accommodate individuals with disabilities, the survey can be completed using speech recognition software or by telephone. The survey can be downloaded from the RSI Action web site at www.rsiaction.org under "injured workers survey." It is in RTF format, compatible with most word processors including Dragon NaturallySpeaking, WordPad, and Microsoft Word. Instructions are included. If you have any questions, or would like a copy mailed to you, please call Kate Lynn at MassCOSH at 617-825-7233 ext. 16.
- July 11 **Kayaking on Walden Pond**, Mondays through August 15 – Sponsored by All Out Adventures, Inc., which will offer accessible equipment, instruction and assistance. Cost is \$3 per person and advance registration is required; Call 413-527-8980 to sign up or check the <www.alloutadventures.org>. The programs of All Out Adventures provide individuals of all abilities outdoor recreation opportunities to learn new skills and build self-confidence.
- July 12 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. Meets 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at MIT in Building 2, Rm 142. Go to <www.bostonvoiceusers.com> to find out more about meetings and discussions.
- July 14 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.
- July 15 **DEADLINE to submit entries to *Shifting Gears*, a National Juried Exhibit for Young Artists with Disabilities.** Grand prize is \$20,000, First is \$10,000, Second is \$6000, with 12 additional Awards of Excellence of \$2000 each. The theme of the exhibit is to reflect on a pivotal moment or event in your life that led you to a greater understanding of yourself in relation to your art and/or your disability. The competition is open to artists, age 16-25 who live in the US and have a physical, cognitive or mental disability. Entries should be submitted on 35mm slides. For applications and more information contact VSA arts at 800-933-8721, x3877 voice, 202-737-0725 fax, 202-737-0645 TTY or email: <voa@vsarts.org> or check web site at <www.vsarts.org/x267>. Sponsored by VSA arts and Volkswagen of America.
- July 16 **Learn to sail in Boston Harbor** – Join a team of Outdoor Exploration staff and participants to learn about rigging, tying knots and steering the boat under the guidance of a skilled skipper. Use state-of-the-art keelboats that combine stability with speed, making them ideal for adaptive sailing and for spending a day on the water. The fee of \$35 per person includes equipment and instruction customized to your needs, personal floatation devices, and snacks. A \$10 deposit is required to reserve a spot. To register, call 781-395-4999 or email info@outdoorex.org.
- July 18 **Kayaking on Walden Pond** – see July 11 listing for details.
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- July 21 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.
- July 24 **Spend a day kayaking along New England's coast near Marblehead.** Experienced staff from Outdoor Explorations will introduce participants to basic kayak safety, paddle strokes, and the excitement of traveling on the water. The day includes equipment and instruction customized to your needs, use of kayak, paddles, and personal floatation devices, and snacks. Cost is \$50 person; \$10 deposit is required to reserve a spot. To register, call 781-395-4999 or email info@outdoorex.org.
- July 25 **Kayaking on Walden Pond** – see July 11 listing for details.
- July 25 **Corey Nelson to be honored with Plaque at Union Station in Worcester.** The ribbon cutting ceremony will be at 9 a.m. sponsored by Center for Living and Working (CLW). The installation of this new plaque on the outer wall of Union Station, facing the accessible platform, will honor the memory of one of Central Massachusetts' leading advocates and also recognize the unity demonstrated by the disability community of Central Massachusetts to achieve equal access for everyone. Contact Mike Ritz 508-363-1226 x104, or mritz@centerlw.org for more details or to request special accommodations. ASL Interpreters will be present.
- July 26** **15th ANNIVERSARY of the signing of the AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) ADA ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AT DUNN POND STATE PARK** (rain or shine) Food and entertainment will be provided for the picnic, 11 am – 3:30 pm. The park has a pond, trails and play equipment; plan on spending the day visiting, swimming, canoeing, or cycling. The Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Universal Access program will provide kayaks and hand cycles for people to try out. Dunn State Park is in Gardner. **RSVP** to Steve Higgins at Mass. Statewide Independent Living Council at toll free 1-866-662-7452 voice/tty or email him at [<steveh@masilc.org>](mailto:steveh@masilc.org).
- July 27 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA (AACT)**, 1 – 3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 2. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request Interpreters. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.
- July 28 **LD/ADHD Task Force** for persons with Learning Disabilities / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and is now meeting at MRC State headquarters, 27-48 Wormwood Street in Boston (south of Fort Point Channel) in the 6th floor large conference room. Business meeting at 11 a.m. - 1p.m. For more information contact Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117 voice; 617-497-5257 fax.
- July 30 **Romeo and Juliet**, a FREE performance at 1 p.m. on the Boston Common, wheelchair accessible, ASL interpreted, and with close captioned and audio description available. Presented by the Wang Center for the Arts. For more information or to help in planning the event, contact Devin Chausse, Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) at 617-338-6665 voice, 617-338-6661 fax, 617-338-6662 TTY or [<dchausse@bontoncil.org>](mailto:dchausse@bontoncil.org).
- July 31-Aug. 6 **Self-Sufficient Camping at Nickerson State Park on Cape Cod**, sponsored by the Universal Access Program of the Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Reserve either a tent or yurt (with ramped deck) site for up to 7 nights. Fees range from \$15 to \$40 per person. There is no formal program structure or staff to assist, but some accessible activities are available in the park, including beach wheelchair and handcycle rentals. For more information contact Marcy Marchello at 413-545-5758 or email [<Marcy.Marchello@state.ma.us>](mailto:Marcy.Marchello@state.ma.us).
- August 1 Kayaking on Walden Pond – see July 11 listing for details.
- August 3 **RSI Monthly Drop-in Group** - see July 6 listing for details.
- August 8 **Kayaking on Walden Pond** – see July 11 listing for details.
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- August 13 **Learn to sail in Boston Harbor** – see July 16 listing for details.
- August 13-14 **Family overnight camping program** sponsored by Outdoor Explorations provides equipment and instruction customized to your needs, tents, all camping gear and activities, all meals, snacks, and beverages for \$50 per person. For more information and to reserve a place, call 781-395-4999 or email [<info@outdoorex.org>](mailto:info@outdoorex.org).

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- September 8 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.

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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Access**Letter** is produced by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities,
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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

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Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

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