



just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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EDITORIAL

BY RENÉE LACHANCE

Access no longer denied

Kudos to businesses and organizations that are making accessibility a priority

My friend Rupert Kinnard was involved in a car accident two years ago and it left him paralyzed from the waist down. At that time I was struck with the knowledge that full mobility, while often taken for granted, is in no way guaranteed.

Local activist Marguerite Brodie lived her adult life in a wheelchair and taught me the importance of accessibility in public spaces. Brodie passed away last December but her accessibility-issues activism lives with me, reminding me.

Early in the 1980s, I made a personal commitment as an individual and as a business person to utilize establishments that were accessible. I have not always been true to my commitment. For too long the *Just Out* office was two flights up and there was no elevator.

In 1988 when I opened Cafe Mocha with LaVerne Lewis we did extensive remodeling to the space we had rented before opening for business. As part of the renovation we made the bathrooms accessible and built a ramp to the dance floor and sitting room. We had a lower level play room with pinball and pool tables but ran out of funds to make that space accessible.

On the evening of our grand opening we had several patrons in wheelchairs who attended. The women who came wheeled about with plenty of turning room and though it was crowded seemed comfortable in the surroundings until coming upon stairs leading down to the play room.

"Hey," one of the women called to me as the front wheels of her chair spun over the steps. "Where's the ramp?"

I explained that we ran out of money to build a play-room ramp but that we would do so as soon as the project was affordable. The look of disappointment that washed over her face and the guilt I felt for not having made that ramp a priority stick with me still—like Brodie's lessons.

The point I want to make is that I have juggled several sides of the accessibility issue. I'm personally committed to support accessible establishments. I've made a professional commitment to rent public spaces based on acces-

sibility. I have been a business owner trying to find the funds to make a space accessible. I have friends who have mobility issues. I have compassion for all sides of the struggle.

That's why I want to applaud In Other Words and the Metropolitan Community Church.

The board and volunteers of In Other Words finally removed a platform that had long blocked accessibility to a portion of the bookstore for people with limited mobility in our community. Five years ago when *Just Out* questioned the management about the problem, they rationalized their decision to put in the platform and did nothing to change it. Many of us with a personal commitment chose other places to spend our book money. Now, thanks to enterprising volunteers, the platform has been dismantled and access is no longer denied. (See related story page 7.)

MCC had long lived with a less than adequate lift that allowed people with limited mobility to avoid the flight of stairs into the building as long as they had assistance.

Recently MCC replaced the inadequate lift with one that meets all Americans With Disabilities Act requirements and allows wheelchair users to utilize the lift independently. Last year's MCC-sponsored Shepherd's Award Dinner and fundraising within the church raised the necessary dollars for the new lift. Some volunteer energy helped with the installation.

I hope the actions of In Other Words, MCC and the spirit of volunteerism inspires other businesses in our community to make their spaces accessible as well.

Imagine an army of lovers armed with hammers, nails, and 2 x 4's building ramps and widening doorways to make more of our spaces welcoming to all. It's certainly possible. I won't even mention my tool belt fantasies.

■ This year's MCC Shepherd's Award Dinner will be held May 1. Call 281-8868 for more information.

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