



Flying High

LILA hopes to bring the community together during an evening of uniquely educational plays.

You're leaving for dinner at your favorite restaurant. Walking down your front steps, you get into your car and drive to the café, where you then walk up a flight of stairs. A host shows you through the crowded dining room to your usual table — a tiny one in the corner by the window. You eat, leave, and drive home. And you don't think twice about it.

But people with physical challenges have to think more than twice about such an evening. If they rely on wheelchairs, how will they drive to the restaurant or make it up the flight of stairs, much less through the crowded dining room? If they are blind, will the restaurant have a brail menu, or will someone be available to read the menu to them? People with disabilities face these kinds of challenges every day; challenges that the "temporarily able-bodied" are not likely to meet in their everyday lives. The word "temporarily" is in recognition of the fact that all of us will become disabled at some point, if we live long enough.

In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Now it's against the law for employers to discriminate against people with disabilities, and mandated that public buildings, transportation, and telecommunications must accommodate people with disabilities.

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the ADA, the Lane Independent Living Association (LILA) will host a week-long celebration beginning July 26. The celebration's main attraction will be a performance, entitled "Flying High," of four one-act plays at the Soreng Theatre at the Hult Center. The performance will be preceded by a gala reception, 7:30 pm hosted by Mayor Kitty Piercy.

The plays LILA is producing are written and directed by award winning playwright Bjo Ashwill, who is herself a person with a disability. Ashwill has produced plays both here in Eugene and in Portland, and has been part of the festival for the Actor's Cabaret for the past two years. "LILA suggested that we do something different, something that would attract more people than just those who already know about the ADA," Ashwill says. "We decided we'd do a festival of my one-act plays, each of which has people in it with disabilities as well as temporarily able-bodied actors."

LILA is hoping that the celebration and

plays will provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between the disabled and non-disabled parts of the community. "Our intent is to entertain, to have fun, but I also think that we'll give people a few things to think about in terms of how much we are all alike — whether we're disabled or not," Ashwill says.

Jon West, LILA director, is also trying to get local businesses involved in the celebration. "The businesses are coming aboard because we communicated the fact that this is about the Americans with Disabilities Act, which relates to employment," West says. When a business decides to support the event, they purchase a minimum of 10 tickets to the plays at a price of \$15 each. LILA then sends a representative to the business to conduct a 45-minute training in some of the critical issues of the ADA as it relates to employment and public access. West says that different businesses may have different projects going on that could benefit from such training. For instance, one supporter of the event, a medical group, is building a new clinic and found the training to be an opportune time to sit down with people with disabilities and get feedback on the construction of the facility.

"I think one of the major draws to LILA bringing businesses in on an event like this is that LILA is a non-profit organization run by and for people with disabilities," West says. "What that means is that when we talk to businesses about the ADA and about accessibility, we're bringing that very strong perspective of people who are actually living with disabilities. People who just don't have to talk about accessibility, but have to face it every day."

The four one-act plays, which are comedies, will be performed at 7:30 pm Tuesday, July 26, at the Soreng. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at the Hult Ticket Center and at the LILA office. The ticket price also includes admission to the gala reception that precedes the performance at 6:30 pm in Studio One. The WOW Hall will host 2 pm matinees July 30-31, tickets \$5.

Both West and Ashwill are enthusiastic about the event, and hope to educate the community on important disability issues through an evening of laughter and learning. "The plays are comedies, which is pretty unique," West says. "If you're going to learn about disability issues, you might as well go to the performance and have fun doing it." **EW**



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