

Sundays at the Elks

Beginning Sunday, July 1, 2012
6PM - 10PM

Schedule of Events:

July 1

Sunday Night Jazz
Featuring Shirley Nanette

July 8

Karaoke

July 15

Sunday Night Jazz
Featuring Shirley Nanette

July 22

Karaoke

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Tired of Being Invisible

continued ▲ from front

acknowledging that any single solitary person can wake up and find themselves a person with a disability."

According to Cheron, people with disabilities have historically been viewed as the largest burden on society.

"We saw back in the holocaust that people with disabilities were the first ones sent to the gas chambers and even earlier, people with mental health issues or developmental disabilities, were institutionalized because society didn't know what to do with them or see them as equal members," she said.

Cheron said the first really significant law to address issues was the civil rights law that basically said everyone deserved equal treatment and equal access to government services, including people of color and people of disability.

"It was the first law that said government needs to be equal and fair to everyone," she said. "People with disability, because of that law, now have equal access to government and government services."

She said, however, the law didn't ensure those living with a disability that they would have equal access to their doctor's offices or grocery stores, because those aren't government entities.

Comprised of seven titles, Cheron said the ADA ensures

equal access to employment, local government, public access, and communication.

The city of Portland's Disability Program was re-established in 2006 in the Office of Neighborhood Involvement to connect, support and encourages collaborative civic engagement between the people of the disability community, neighborhoods and city government.

Although Cheron, who was beginning college when the ADA was enacted, doesn't remember much of what it was like before the law, she said there are many reasons why challenges still remain.

"People don't really truly understand the way the law is meant to work," Cheron said. "We still have lots of places in Portland that aren't accessible."

Cheron said one of the reasons for this is because there are several ways of getting around the law that happens more than people realize.

"The other day I went to the store with a friend in northwest Portland. Didn't call ahead of time," she said. "Part of my privilege is that being an adult after the ADA, I make the presumption things will be accessible, but often times, I am confronted with naivety, and I can't get into things because there isn't a ramp or a way inside."

Other challenges, said Cheron, include difficulties like she faced finding housing when she first moved to the city after graduating from Portland State University, where she received two masters in public administration and conflict resolution.

"When I graduated and moved out here I got student housing, which was wheelchair accessible. But when I graduated I needed to find housing in Portland, and this was a huge challenge," she said. "Partly because there is not a ton of accessible housing, and where it is, there is not a grand list to show them."

Cheron said, currently, there is something called housing connections, which is a good start, but it is inventoried by landlords, who often don't understand what accessible features are.

I kept being told the rentals were accessible, but they weren't, she said. "And It took me over a year after graduating to find housing."

Especially in Portland, the ADA remains controversial, she said, before explaining how the process of historical preservation has revealed resident priorities.

"There is this idea that buildings that have historic value don't need to be accessible because they are grandfathered in or historical," she said. "But that is not

true. Under the ADA, they are meant to be made accessible unless it doesn't preserve what is historic about the building."

The Old Church is a really great example, she said. "They built a ramp, and they hired an architect to see how to do this. It preserved its historical value, but it didn't preserve the historical oppression of people with disability."

Through these challenges, Cheron said she realized her personal desire to help others living with disabilities within her own community.

"In that process I started to get involved with organizations and did some testifying before the county around housing. Through that, I met people here in the city working for the Housing Bureau," she said. "There was a part of me, as a person with a disability, that thought, shouldn't I start with my community first? And so that's what I did."

Although there is a long way to go, Cheron said the city has made some great strides to make Portland more accessible. "The city has a commission on disabilities. And that has been put into resolution in 2009 and they have been doing some really good work," she said.

"Out of my office, we do disability self preparedness for emergency, and a voluntary emergency registry where we encourage people to put their information into, so if there is a major disaster the information can go to responders or voluntary responders."

Cheron said she is proud of the work she has done, but increased efforts are necessary.

"As baby boomers are getting older, more and more people are using mobility devices. This is the first time in history when we are looking at such a large number of people aging at one time," she said.

"Starting this year, approximately 8,000 baby boomers turn 65, which can translate into one out of every two people over the age of 65 with some form of disability."

Although some people look at disability as a medical model, or people look at that it is something wrong, Cheron said she believes a disability is only as challenging as society makes it, because if society removed all the barriers, then it wouldn't be an issue any longer.

"It is the physical barriers and social barriers that keep people with disabilities from being part of the dominant culture," she said. "My hope for the future is that we continue to eliminate these barriers, so disabilities become something that is less stigmatized and relevant," she said.

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