



Designing Accessible Communities



Newsletter - Summer 2011

The mission of Designing Accessible Communities (DAC) is to promote, facilitate and support the use of accessible design, accessible manufactured products and the implementation of policies which ensure that all individuals, regardless of age or disability, are able to participate fully in all aspects of our community and society.

DAC is a 501c3 non-profit organization. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax

deductible _____

A Service Dog Goes to School

Four out of every 100 children in the US have a food allergy and peanut allergy is the most common cause of food related deaths. The National Center for Health Statistics reported in 2008 that from 2004 to 2006, there were approximately 9,500

hospital discharges per year with a diagnosis related to food allergy, among children under 18.

Any of us who have recently visited playgroups are likely to see a list posted of children's names and the allergies each child has with a description of the foods they must avoid.

Some months ago the parents of a boy with a life-threatening peanut allergy contacted Designing Accessible Communities for help. Cameron is so allergic to peanuts that even being exposed to peanut particles might kill him. When in Middle school, even though he had not actually eaten any nuts, he went into anaphylactic shock and had to be taken to the hospital. To offset this danger, Cameron's parents arranged for a specially trained service dog to be with Cameron at all times to alert him to the presence of peanuts, even if only peanut residue. However, the school in Kern County attended by their son was not ready to allow the service dog to come to school with him. The school was concerned that the dog might become a distraction or even a danger to other children by causing allergic reactions himself. In fact, the dog is short haired, has low dander and is professionally trained.

The story has a happy ending. Cameron's parents contacted DAC and we were able to offer support and resources that enabled the parents to work with the school district. Cameron, now a High School junior, takes his Portuguese water dog, Duke, with him to school each day. Duke has been specially trained to sniff out even remnants of peanuts and then to signal to Cameron, by touching him with a paw, not to come closer. Cameron has had the dog, now a certified service dog, since Duke was a puppy. They make a good team – a life saving team.



Words have Power

"People First" language dates from 1988 and was recommended by advocacy groups in the United States. It is a form of disability language etiquette. So we talk of "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people". We say "A person who is blind" instead of "A blind person". Although there are criticisms that People First language can be cumbersome, proponents argue that the focus on the disability by placing it first, distracts from the humanity of the person.

We still hear the word "handicapped" used to refer to parking places and things in the built environment. "He's in the handicapped parking space". The correct terms are accessible parking places and accessible doors, ramps and other architectural features. A person "uses" a wheelchair for mobility, he or she is not "confined" to a wheelchair or



“wheelchair bound”. The words we use are important. They create a picture and we can make that picture positive or negative depending on the words we

choose.

New Fire Alarm Pull Stations

SimplexGrinnell is a shining example of a company listening to its end users, in this case, people with disabilities, to address a product design issue. SimplexGrinnell, a Tyco International company that sells and services fire and life safety systems throughout the United States and Canada, was faced with the challenge of redesigning or replacing its classic “T handle” fire alarm pull station. Designing Accessible Communities had, on many occasions over many years, informed the manual fire alarm industry that most of the devices being manufactured were not accessible to many persons with disabilities. California Building Code, Title 24, and Federal accessibility requirements mandate that **“Controls and operating mechanisms shall be operable with one hand and shall not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist.”** Skip Vandeventer, Senior Field Sales Engineer for SimplexGrinnell, proposed a simple solution which would make the company’s existing non-accessible pull station accessible while maintaining the device’s classic appearance. Skip and Tyco’s engineering division created a new handle with a protruding handle and non-slip ridge. This new handle design allows the unit to be operated with a single action and without the need for hands. Additionally, the new handle design can easily replace non-accessible handles on existing units without requiring any additional and costly modifications to the pull station. SimplexGrinnell plans to show the prototype device at this summer’s National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Conference and Expo in Boston. Skip says he is hoping the new fire alarm pull stations will be available in late 2011.

DAC is very pleased to have been part of the development of this accessible and life-saving design adaptation and looks forward to the manual fire alarm industry making similar accessibility design changes to its manual fire alarm pull products.

DAC Special Event

In April, after spending countless hours in the development of the event plan, DAC Executive Director Richard Skaff and Co-host, Jonathon Goldman, the Director of Public Works for the City of Sausalito, presented an exciting and educational demonstration event that took place at the Sausalito City Hall. Between 25 to 30 people attended the event, including representatives from Cal Trans, California State Parks, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Bay Area Cities Public Works staff and ADA Coordinators, Marin Municipal Water District staff, Bay Area architects as well as representatives from the California Council for the Blind and representatives from a public interest law firm, Disability Rights Advocates. Those present were treated to a

demonstration of two relatively new products that if used, will assure that construction sites on sidewalks, crosswalks or other locations along the public right-of-way where there are pedestrians who may be blind or using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches, will be safe and accessible. The two products are a “speak-out” sign system produced by Elgin Molded Plastics and a barricade system produced by Plastic Safety Systems, Inc. You can see and get more information about the Empco-Lite “speak-out” sign system at:

<http://www.empco-lite.com/barricade/ADA-Lite.htm>. You can see and get more information about the accessible barricade system produced by Plastic Safety Systems, Inc. at: <http://www.plasticsafety.com/safetywall-pedestrian-barricade>.

DAC would like to thank Mr. Goldman and the City of Sausalito for their efforts in working with DAC to make this event a success.