“I’m not the most patient person that can just go along with things. I like stirring the pot and doing different things.”

Joe Bravo, executive director of the Westchester Independent Living Center
Commentary
Academy's Humanitarian Award for Lewis Gets a Big Thumbs-Down

By Arthur W. Blaser

December 10th, 2008, was Human Rights Day. It marked the 60th anniversary of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said that declaration had “more impact on mankind than any other document in modern history.”

December 10th was also when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Board of Governors announced its decision to give Jerry Lewis the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award, to be presented at the 81st annual Academy Awards on February 22nd.

Why should we care when Lewis’ tactics are so patently and transparently shallow and offensive? As STV wrote in the blog, “The Defamer,” “There should be no doubt that the statuette accompanying the Hersholt Award will validate even Lewis’s gravest missteps.” (http://defamer.com/5107518/discuss-jerry-lewis-is-now-an-oscar+winner)

Lewis’ divisive influence mustn’t be associated with “humanitarianism” in 2009, when Hollywood, Washington, D.C., and sites around the globe will witness renewed passion for social justice. More than ever, the world should be promoting rights, universality, equality and openness. The Academy’s award is perverse (an outrage more than incongruous) for many reasons, among them:

1. The award is not in keeping with the Academy’s potential for humanitarianism. At their best, motion pictures break down barriers between “us” and “them.” The hundreds of examples include “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” “Blood Diamond,” “Malcolm X,” “Wall-E,” “Murderball,” “My Left Foot,” “Coming Home,” “At First Sight,” “Norma Rae,” “Silkwood,” “Philadelphia,” “ Milk,” “Gandhi,” “Cry Freedom,” “Little Big Man” and “Children of a Lesser God.” (Many of the best movies are “flawed,” which usually means that they made people think about social justice issues.) Humanitarianism also underlies the actions of a plethora of people in every aspect of the motion picture industry. Many people are involved in almost every movement for human rights, peace, the environment and other social justice issues.

2. The award wrongly associates “humanitarianism” with a charity or medical approach. Humanitarianism entails a social approach, emphasizing how society, rather than target individuals, can be changed. Doris Zames Fleischer and Frieda Zames chronicled “The Disability Rights Movement” with an apt subtitle: “From charity to confrontation.” Embracing disability rights and independent living

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Joe Bravo: Longtime ILC Chief Still Has Passion for Job

By Kathi Wolfe

(This is one in an ongoing series of interviews that Independence Today is conducting with leaders in the independent living movement.)

Joe Bravo’s life changed in a flash. One minute, the 12-year-old was riding his bike in the Bronx, the New York City borough where he grew up. The next minute, someone horseback riding with a rifle shot him from a rooftop. As a result, Bravo’s spinal cord was injured, and he became a wheelchair-using paraplegic.

Today, Bravo, now 53, is executive director of the Westchester Independent Living Center in White Plains, N.Y. Bravo, who came to the Center in 1981, is believed to have held the position longer than any other independent living center (ILC) director in New York state – perhaps even in the country.

During a lengthy telephone interview, Bravo said there is a “tremendous turnover (among ILC executive directors) either from burnout, or they decided to go into government.”

A lot of ILC executive directors or staff members decide that they’re better off taking jobs in the private sector or government because “it’s a lot easier,” he said. “They probably get paid more – which is always an incentive at some point in your life.”

During a wide-ranging conversation, Bravo related what he does to avoid burnout, how he combines being a jock and a disability advocate, and why he remains hopeful despite the bad economy and the disability rights battles that remain to be fought.

Though he began his involvement with disability advocacy in the late 1970s, Bravo, like many people with disabilities of his generation, had little awareness of disability rights when he was growing up. (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act didn’t become law until 1975, and the “504 regulations” of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act weren’t signed until 1977.)

After his injury as a youngster, Bravo spent seven months in rehab and then finished elementary school in a special education class. “It was called a ‘health’ class,” Bravo said. “Junior high was pretty much a segregated class. It wasn’t until high school (that) there was a lot more conversation about integrated classrooms. All the teens with disabilities were in homeroom together, but after that they separated and went into integrated classrooms.”

Bravo attended Theodore Roosevelt High School, “the only accessible high school in the Bronx that my parents or I (were) aware of,” Bravo said. “It was an old school, but they had renovated it and put in an elevator.”

That elevator gave him access to all the floors, and there were ramps to get into and out of the building. Despite that, however, “it was very difficult (interacting with non-disabled classmates).” It was new to see disabled kids being mainstreamed (then) and being around the other kids. It was not the most comfortable thing – the way we were treated.”

Looking back, Bravo took some responsibility for that. “You’re young, you’re insecure – you just got this disability, so you’re not exactly the most outgoing person either.”

Still, Bravo enjoyed school. “I didn’t have any consciousness (of the disability rights movement). I was just happy, after rehab and several summers in the hospital, that the yellow school bus was coming to pick me up and take me wherever. I had no consciousness that I had a right to (go to school) or that somebody (by excluding him from social interactions) might be doing me wrong.”

While in rehab, Bravo had chatted with a few others with spinal-cord injuries, but in high school, he rarely encountered people with disabilities. That soon changed.

“My sister ran across an ad in the paper that they were recruiting disabled guys for a wheelchair basketball team. She knew I was always sports-minded and liked to watch sports.” Bravo went to the practice and met a bunch of Vietnam veterans playing wheelchair sports. “I got hooked. I’ve played sports ever since.”

While wheelchair basketball remains his greatest passion, Bravo has participated in a myriad of sports, from tennis to track and field. “I’m a believer in trying all the sports ... just to see what I would enjoy.”
After high school, Bravo enrolled at Long Island University’s Brooklyn campus, where he majored in political science. “In those days, it was one of the three accessible colleges (in New York).” The others were Hofstra University and Hunter College.

While in college, he began reading about the emerging disability rights movement, “particularly about some of the stuff that (the late disability rights advocate) Ed Roberts was doing.”

And he heard about renowned disability rights leader Judith Heumann, who was then in New York. “She had gone through my college. (I) knew that she was in the midst of suing the board of education in New York City … because at that time she wasn’t allowed to teach because she was disabled.”

Information about the New York advocacy group Disabled in Action was filtering down to him, Bravo said. “I was … on the fringe of that. I was a little younger than the people who were doing that.”

In his senior year at LIU, Bravo met some veterans with disabilities when he was playing sports. They introduced him to people connected with the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, now called the United Spinal Association, and he was hired about six months after his graduation, in late 1978.

But Bravo, who wed his girlfriend, Nadine, the following year (“I'm still married to the same woman.”), left his job as EPVA’s advocacy director after two and a half years. “A lot of their emphasis was veterans’ issues. I’m not a veteran. So my interests were going elsewhere.”

He worked for about a year and a half for the Sullivan County (N.Y.) personnel office before “Pat (Figuroa, disability rights advocate and publisher of Independence Today) called and said ‘independent living centers are springing up in New York state. You might be interested in applying,’ Bravo said.

Bravo’s only previous exposure to independent living had been when he’d served as a volunteer part-time peer counselor with the Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York. (At the time, CIDNY and EPVA were located in the same building.) “They’d call me in if they had a paraplegic that they wanted me to talk to,” he said. “I thought I had something to share with some disabled people.”

Figuroa mentioned that the Westchester Independent Living Center was looking for a service coordinator and an executive director. Bravo applied for the latter job but landed the service coordinator post. When the newly hired executive director resigned for health reasons, however, Bravo was hired in that post.

“That was what started me on this 30-year endeavor of independent living.” The center started out providing peer counseling and other core services.

Then “we started (asking), ‘What about client assistance services?’ — working to help them get what they can out of VR (vocational rehabilitation services).”

Starting new endeavors at the center has always excited him, “because if it was always the same things, I would have burned out by now,” Bravo said. “I'm not the most patient person that can just go along with things. I like stirring the pot and doing different things.”

Though he likes diverse programming, he has never wanted his center to get too big. “It’s not that my program is one of those 20-million-dollar IL centers. I've never wanted that. I've always kept it … what it was supposed to be: very grassroots-oriented.”

This year his center’s budget will be about $2.5 million, “which I think is plenty big for what I want to do,” Bravo said. “It has grown from that first year, where I think we had a $50,000 expenditure.”

Though he doesn’t devalue centers with huge budgets (“They have a different vision of what needs to be done in their communities, and I respect that.”), Bravo worries that the grassroots values of the independent living movement can be lost when ILC programs become too large.

“Exemplary Service to People with Disabilities” at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in October 2008. Courtesy of Rita Casey.

Joe Bravo presenting Senator L. Vincent Leibell, III, an award for: “Exemplary Service to People with Disabilities.”

“There’s the concern that the bigger you become, the more traditional you become because you're taking on funding that’s still based on a traditional medical model.

“The bigger you get, the bigger management you need. If you're a 15- to 20-million-dollar program, all of a sudden it becomes driven by all that money and all that it represents.”

Whenever you get money, you have to do reporting — you have to be accountable to funding sources, Bravo said. “You got to have that infrastructure — audits — all of that.”

Though he’s a member of the National Council of Independent Living and has served on NCIL’s board of directors, he has chosen to focus his energies on the New York state independent living scene. “There was so much that we needed and still need to do just in my state that I always thought that’s where my interests lie.”

Unlike many athletes with disabilities, Bravo feels a deep connection with the disability rights movement. The same skills that he uses in sports help him navigate the challenges of the independent living movement, he said. “It’s the same aggressiveness that I find on the basketball court – banging chairs with people who are much bigger and faster than me — that keep me doing IL because you always see the next challenge.”

When you’re involved in sports, there’s nothing that you feel you can’t do for yourself, Bravo said. “You feel like you’re really not all disabled, even though you are. Your mind is saying to you, ‘I can do whatever I feel like doing. So why should I be … fighting for (disability) rights?’”
“Yo, down here,” she calls to bank tellers, grocery checkers and others who tower over her behind counters.

Maria Telesca might be riding a scooter, but her primary identity is not wheelchair rider: it is dwarf. She is a person of short stature, former officer of Little People of America (LPA) and director of professional development for Kean University in New Jersey.

“Accommodation is still a hurdle,” Telesca says. “The world isn’t made for us. ADA applies, but because we are so short, it is more applicable to people in wheelchairs.”

With the popularity of the reality show "Little People Big World" (LPBW) about Matt and Amy Roloff and their family, there has been a resurgence of focus on people with dwarfism. “LPBW” chronicles the family on their farm and community in western Oregon. The Roloffs and their son Zach are people of short stature; the other three Roloff children are not.

In the 1950s when actor Billy Barty founded LPA, it was called Midgets of America. Then came the term “little people.” In people-first language, “people with dwarfism” is a politically correct term, as is “people of short stature.” Within the community, there are some who use “little people” the way “crip” is used in the disability community. Those involved in LPA sometimes refer to themselves as LPs.

“The whole ‘little people’ thing sounds demeaning,” says Telesca, who noted that dwarfs range in height from about 2 and a half feet tall to 4 feet 11. “If you Google the word, you find it is used for children, as in Little People Day Care Center. Ninety-seven percent of people of short stature are dwarfs. They have acrocephalosy -- the upper body is proportionate with short arms and legs.”

While people with dwarfism share some common ground with people with disabilities, the links are edgy rather than interlocking circles. The former are covered by the definition of disability, but disability rights laws are mainly useful to combat employment discrimination. Architectural and public accommodations guidelines are generally not useful to them.

“Accessible hotel rooms work against us,” Matt Roloff says. “We can’t reach the sink, bed or toilet. I don’t know why we have not pushed for stools.” Roloff notes that hotel chains Microtel and Carlson are friendly to people with dwarfism. They have done extensive marketing to the broader disability community as well. He added that auxiliary aids allow most people with dwarfism to perform all needed activities of daily living.

The history of most people with disabilities is one of exclusion through pity and institutionalization.

The history of people with dwarfism has been as the objects of laughter, derision and abuse. A dwarf’s version of the African-American movie character Stepin’ Fetchit would be a sideshow in a circus act. Forms have shifted over the years. There are positive media portrayals, such as Peter Denglish in the movie "The Station Agent" and Marion Eaton on the television series "Boston Legal."

Writer Dan Kennedy addressed the cultural fascination with dwarfs in an article in the March 2006 edition of Slate magazine: “…There is a certain cognitive dissonance in seeing adults who have some of the physical characteristics of children -- the short stature, of course, but also disproportionately short arms and legs and slightly enlarged heads. These differences have forever cast dwarfs as celebrities, whether they like it or not. From gods in ancient Egypt, to the royal courts of Europe, to the sideshows in 19th-century America, dwarfs have never been allowed to just be; every little person is intimately familiar with the supremely unpleasant experience of being the subject of scrutiny.”

Matt and Amy Roloff have seen a change in people’s attitudes since the premiere of “LPBW.”

“Now it’s hard to tell whether they are gawking at us because we are dwarfs or because of ‘LPBW,’” Matt says. “When we get negative comments, it is usually because they didn’t like our messy house or something else about how we live.”

Before becoming well known, the Roloffs encountered barriers familiar to many in the disability community. “We faced discrimination,” Matt says. “Amy wanted a career in the hospitality industry but ended up taking a secretarial job.” Employers didn’t deem people of short stature appropriate for interacting with customers.

Matt faced similar employment roadblocks. He wanted to be in sales but became a software programmer. Whatever companies passed him up missed vast improvement in their bottom line. Roloff has indefatigable energy, a high IQ and an extraordinarily engaging personality.

When asked about policy changes, Matt stresses employment and the need for employers to stay open-minded when hiring.

“Imagine you’ve always wanted to open a toy store,” he says. “You have experience. You want to sell through the Internet and from a storefront. You hire a bookkeeper and a manager. They say they know a great salesperson and tell you how wonderful their skills are. You hire them sight unseen after a phone interview. The person shows up with a white cane. You are thinking they can’t possibly help you sell toys. Yet that blind person has felt toys and can bring a whole new awareness to that product.”

Roloff also believes if there were substantial benefits to employers, they would hire more people with disabilities and dwarfism. He suggested tax-credit incentives as well as medical coverage.

Roloff noted that the entire disability movement “has a hypersensitivity about language. I don’t care much whether someone uses the term dwarf, midget or little person. It’s the attitude of the person that’s important. Now if someone uses ‘midget’ like Jimmy Kimmel did, I really take exception.”

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As the 10th anniversary of the monumental U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Americans with Disabilities Act case of *Olmstead v. L.C.* and *E.W.* approaches in June 2009, the lawyer who first conceived of using the ADA to fight institutionalization on a large scale continues to be aggressive in the courts.

Philadelphia native Steve Gold, 66, has no disability and had no knowledge of the disability rights or independent living movements until he was well into his career in the 1980s. But since 1990, he has dedicated his professional life to pursuing high-stakes disability rights cases. He doesn’t always win and sometimes he loses big. Thus, sometimes he goes a long time between paydays. “I often do not get any pay when we lose a case, which does happen quite a bit,” he admitted.

In the case of Helen L. v. Didario, Gold, as counsel representing a resident of a Pennsylvania state institution, put forth the rationale that forcing people with disabilities to be institutionalized in order to receive support services violated Title II of ADA, which requires states to provide services in the most integrated setting appropriate to an individual’s needs. Gold lost in the district but won in the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in 1995. That case was the catalyst for the *Olmstead* case in Georgia.

Last fall, Gold helped win another important victory as one of the plaintiff attorneys in the case of *Freeman v. Goldberg.* Venturing quadriplegic Clay Freeman sued the Oregon Department of Human Services. In the settlement, the state agreed, among other things, to pay Freeman’s home assistants an additional $3 per hour to make it easier for him to retain workers who can deliver his high level of care.

“It’s so important to recognize that people have different, individual needs and that one formula cannot fit all,” Gold said. “By the state agreeing to recognize that Clay’s and the other people in Oregon who use vents needs are different, this settlement is one small but important step.”

You’ll find Gold at every national ADAPT action, marching along and working with the legal team on behalf of arrestees. When Gold attended his first ADAPT action with the Philadelphia ADAPT group in San Francisco in 1992, it cemented his commitment to disability rights work. “I was truly blown away!” he said.

Beyond his work, the center of Gold’s life is his wife, Barbara, a pediatrician. They have been married for 43 years.

In the following interview, Gold discusses his formative years and some of his legal cases:

**Independence Today:** Growing up, what did you hear, see or experience that shaped your overall progressive political outlook?

**Gold:** I grew up quite low-income in a white, ethnic, Catholic neighborhood. I saw and heard lots of overt racism and anti-Semitism, and I actually was the victim of a few situations.

**IT:** Like what?

**Gold:** How about having a catcher yell to the pitcher, “Hit the kike in the head”?! I remember having to fight after school when kids called me various names, which at the time I had no idea what they meant but knew they were slanderous and had to be stood up against. My late adolescence and early adulthood was extremely focused on racial civil rights in the North and anti-war activities, both of which resulted in a number of arrests for civil disobedience.

**IT:** Many progressives who don’t have disabilities never make the disability connection. What did you experience that put it all together?

**Gold:** I went to law school specifically to do poverty law. Throughout the 1970s, when I worked at legal services, I was in charge of class actions and brought many Medicaid, public assistance, education lawsuits. But I never, never had either disability cases or disability awareness.

In 1982, I had to quit legal aid over a political issue and was a sole practitioner with no work. A blind friend came in my office and told me about blind Social Security employees who provided telephone information but were not permitted to give the same information face to face because the regional SSA rep said the public would not trust them. He began my education. In 1984, the ACLU brought me a case that a law professor at Temple had lost and asked if I was interested in taking the appeal. It was about a hearing-impaired school bus driver who wore hearing aids. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation would not renew his license because they said he might turn off his aids if the kids were too loud, he might not hear a siren, his batteries would go and a number of other stereotypes. Winning this case started me on my understanding of how we non-disabled had a lot of stereotypes.

I also met and saw a lot of extremely active disabled folks and heard about their work. I am still a sole practitioner, but as I’ve gotten older I’ve tried to bring cases only with a local co-counsel. In the 2000s, my wife has a veto. I make a preliminary decision regarding how important is the suit and then she can nix it. She tries to make me justify why the case is important, how much travel is involved, etc. She and I were arrested a lot together! Her politics and mine are entirely in sync. But she has much more common sense than I do.

**IT:** How did the Helen L. case turn into the *Olmstead* case?

**Gold:** I was in Georgia doing a workshop and Sue Jamieson, a legal aid lawyer there, told me about the two women (L.C. and E.W.). I sent her all my briefs, etc., and they used it and won in circuit (court).

**IT:** What do you think of the *Olmstead* decision?

**Gold:** It’s a 10-year-old compromise that I hope in the next 10 years will be eliminated. Waiting lists to get out of institutions and to end segregation might have made sense in 1999. For a few years, a “plan” made sense. But 10 years later? Anyone who wants out should be able to get out immediately!

**IT:** What difference has it made?

**Gold:** It has changed the flow of the oceans! In (fiscal year) 1999, Medicaid spent 89 percent of long-term-care funds on nursing homes and 11 percent on community-based services. In (fiscal year) 2007, it was 69 percent on nursing...
Obama Plan Would Empower People with Disabilities

By Brenda Brown-Grooms

During the 23-month primary and election campaigns, President-elect Barack Obama and Vice President-Elect Joseph Biden were among the two strongest and most consistent respondents to questions from the disability community concerning their stands on what the U.S. government should maintain and put in place to better serve the roughly 54 million Americans (1 in 6) with disabilities. Since the election, the two have published a position paper (www.barackobama.com) that both outlines the problem, as they perceive it, and proposes what their administration will do about it.

According to the position paper, since Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, “Americans with disabilities still do not have an equal opportunity to fulfill the American Dream. In 2006, working-age Americans with disabilities were almost three times more likely to live below the poverty line than those without disabilities. While the average annual household income of individuals in the United States without disabilities was $65,400 in 2006, the average annual household income for people with disabilities was $36,300 (a difference of $29,100). And the employment rate for people with disabilities in 2006 was at least 40 points lower than the employment rate of working-age individuals without disabilities. These dismal statistics offer evidence of severe shortcomings in our country’s efforts to break down the barriers that exclude people with disabilities and deprive them of true equality of opportunity and independence.”

Obama and Biden say that the United States should show the rest of the world how a compassionate, civilized country “empowers people with disabilities (PWD) to take full advantage of their talents and become independent, integrated members of society.” To that end, they have both pledged to have the U.S. sign the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first human rights treaty in the 21st century. The treaty is seen as foundational to respecting the rights of PWD worldwide.

In keeping with their campaign pledges, Obama and Biden have outlined a four-part plan to provide Americans with disabilities “the greatest possible access to the same opportunities as those without disabilities.” The plan includes 1) educational opportunities, 2) increased vigilance to end discrimination and promote equal opportunity, 3) increased employment of workers with disabilities, and 4) support of independent, community-based living for those with disabilities.

Educational Opportunities

The pledge to provide increased educational opportunities for Americans with disabilities rests on fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although Congress has pledged to ante up 40% of each state’s “excess cost” of educating children with disabilities, the federal government has never kept its promise to do so beyond 17% of that cost. Not only do Obama and Biden promise to fully fund IDEA, they also say they will ensure “effective implementation and enforcement of the act.”

The president-elect and vice president-elect have pledged to invest $10 billion per year in early intervention educational and developmental programs for children with disabilities age 5 and under. The plan will expand Early Head Start and include Early Learning Challenge Grants. Implementation will include integrating IDEA Part C with other early childhood programs.

Because fewer than half of the states screen all infants for the American College of Medical Genetics’ full recommended panel of 29 disorders, and so many of those conditions, if caught early, can be treated before they result in permanent impairments or even death, the Obama administration supports universal screening. In addition, it supports rescreening for all 2-year-olds, the age at which some conditions, including autism spectrum disorders, begin to appear. The aim is to coordinate fragmented community programs “to help provide parents with information about screening for disabilities as infants and again as 2-year-olds.”

Do you know of an important date in disability history?

Send it to Mike Reynolds at: uppitycrip@gmail.com

1812. By 1814, however, he was almost totally deaf.

December 18th, 1947 – Disability rights pioneer Judy Heumann is born. Heumann contracted polio at 18 months and has spent most of her life in a wheelchair. In 1970, she co-founded Disabled in Action in New York City. In 1977, she was one of the leaders of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sit-in, the longest occupation of a federal building in U.S. history, to pass Section 504, a precursor to the ADA. She co-founded the World Institute on Disabiity in 1983 with Ed Roberts and Joan Leon, serving as co-director until 1993. She served in the Clinton administration as assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services at the U.S. Department of Education from 1993 to 2001. She is now the World Bank Group’s advisor on disability and development.

-- Compiled from various sources by Mike Reynolds

This Day
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options from VA Software to provide credibility to the company and act as a hired “co-curate conscience.” He has spoken in more than 15 countries on six continents and appears in the documentary “Revolution OS,” a film on the development of the Linux operating system.

December 16th, 1770 -- Ludwig van Beethoven, German composer and virtuoso pianist, is born. He was one of the crucial figures in the transitional period between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western classical music and remains one of the most respected and influential composers of all time. Born in Bonn in modern-day Germany, he moved to Vienna, Austria, in his early twenties, studying with Joseph Haydn and quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Around 1796, Beethoven suffered a severe form of tinnitus, a “ringing” in his ears that made it hard for him to perceive and appreciate music. Beethoven’s hearing loss did not prevent his composing music, but it made concerts increasingly difficult. Despite his obvious distress, Beethoven could still hear speech and music until...
means rejecting the deficit model. For decades, Lewis has promoted that model. Instead of recognizing what society lacks, Lewis emphasizes what people are lacking, with such statements as, “My kids can’t go out in the workplace.” We're all better off if we change the workplace, rather than the kids. The Academy’s award extols crass manipulation. Lewis' telethon tactics are the antithesis of humanitarianism. Their basis in pity is negative, what the “kids” allegedly can’t do (although they often can) and the audacity of “nope.”

3. The award should recognize our common humanity. Jerry Lewis and the MDA presume a hierarchy between the helpers and the helped. While many organizations recognize disability-related social change issues, Lewis ignores them. The Christopher Reeve Foundation promotes community access through “quality of life” grants as part of its work -- not so with Lewis and MDA. Changes came to the Special Olympics, evident in its endorsement of “The Ringer.” The renaming of organizations like The Arc, TASH and VSA Arts (no longer “Special”) is accompanied by participation in common concerns. The Academy’s award reminds us that the outrages keep on coming. Just as the Academy’s award extols crass manipulation, so with Lewis and MDA. Changes so with Lewis and MDA presume a deficit model. For decades, Lewis has promoted that model. Instead of acknowledging what society lacks, Lewis emphasizes what people are lacking, with such statements as, “My kids can’t go out in the workplace.” We're all better off if we change the workplace, rather than the kids. The Academy's award extols crass manipulation. Lewis’ telethon tactics are the antithesis of humanitarianism. Their basis in pity is negative, what the “kids” allegedly can’t do (although they often can) and the audacity of “nope.”

4. The award exemplifies power and privilege at its unkindest. It’s an illusion that awards like the Oscars and Olympics can be free from politics. We must bring humans and universality back in, inside and outside of the awards. A 2009 “humanitarian” award for Jerry Lewis encourages a false separation between “humanitarianism” (represented by Lewis) and “politics” (represented by critics of the award). We have important challenges, including the Community Choice Act and the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act. Moving on to enable integration into the community requires coming to grips with a question that should have been answered long ago: “Why should people be given a choice if they are not worthy of rights?”

5. An award for Lewis’ “humanitarianism” is for numbing the mind, not sharpening it. Lewis’ defenders insist that critics need to “lighten up.” An Australian journalist remarked that gay rights organizations objecting to Lewis’ remarks need to “humour bypass.” Not so. Far from being “PC police” with no sense of humor, it’s common to appreciate a wide variety of humor that makes us think. Josh Blue, Alex Valdez, Ellen DeGeneres, Dick Gregory, Jerry Seinfeld, Whoopi Goldberg and many others use humor to sharpen the mind.

It is hoped that we can then move on to consider broad issues related to the construction of “disability” in writings such as Mary Johnson’s “A Test of Wills: Jerry Lewis, Jerry’s Orphans, and the Telethon,” from the September 1992 “Disability Rag” http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/archive/jerry92.htm; Laura Hershey’s 1993 essay, “From Poster Child to Protester” http://www.cripcommentary.com/frompost.html; or Harriet McBryde Johnson’s “Honk if You Hate Telethons” from her 2005 book, “Too Late to Die Young; Nearly True Tales from a Life.”

Our newly elected president, Barack Obama, has pledged that the U.S. will rejoin the human rights community. One way of looking forward would be if America becomes a party to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The new year also will welcome the Oscars, the Emmys, the Peoples’ Choice Awards, elections, Nobel Prizes and other forms of recognition. These can either be occasions for affirming or ignoring our common humanity. A humanitarian award for Jerry Lewis at the 2009 Oscars is a sure means of looking backward.

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Arthur Blaser is professor of political science at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., where he has taught since 1981. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Ohio State University and his J.D. from Southwestern University School of Law in Los Angeles.
Commentary

New Advances Revving Up Motor Imagery

By Amy Halloran

Most of us who are temporarily able-bodied, to steal a great line from the deceased father of a friend, don’t have to think much about movement. When those we love, however, face challenges to mobility, and we watch our family and friends struggle to piece together a grasp or a step, we become aware of the gift that unencumbered motion is.

My father had a dream recently that he could walk easily again. The levity that dream lent him was apparent on his face as he told me how it felt. In my mind’s eye I can see him assume his old form: the gangly jokester ambling through our lives. I imagined him imagining that old freedom, and I wondered if that thought process could have any power to harness.

It turns out that it might, although the good feelings it brought about, not the dream per se, are likely worth something to my father’s health. A greater merit, however, might come from the imagery if it is applied in the right circumstances.

The process of imagining movement to supplement rehearsal or physical practice has long been employed by athletes and musicians. An oboe player I know runs through pieces of music in her mind, feeling the pulse of movements in her fingers, without moving her fingers at all. While the use of similar habits is not yet incorporated into traditional physical and occupational therapies, studies show that motor imagery, or mental imagery, can help with recovery of function.

“The use of imagery in sports and psychology has a long history, with reports from 1870 on,” Susy Braun, a researcher at Zuyd University in the Netherlands, wrote in an e-mail. “Research in rehabilitation has been performed since 2000, so it is short but booming. Some research has been done with stroke, Parkinson’s disease, chronic pain and spinal cord injury. It seems promising for several conditions, but I would be very careful with general conclusions.”

Dr. Jennifer A. Stevens, however, feels very optimistic about the prospects of using motor imagery.

“I spent about five years at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago out of Northwestern, and that’s where I first began conducting the clinical trials on imagery’s use in recovery from stroke, and honestly it was quite new,” Stevens said in a phone interview. She has since moved to an academic position at the College of William and Mary and is developing a program for home use.

“So many people have contacted me to get their hands on another therapy that they can use at home,” she said. “Patients are eager to use anything they can to recover some function. I’ve gone ahead and made a manual for a home program with a DVD. You actually watch someone completing, say, a perfect wrist extension, and the movie goes off and there’s a black screen, and it says, ‘Now imagine your own limb completing the same movement.’”

Stevens tested the study home program at the college, and participants showed improvement. The manual, DVD and apparatus will be available through the Web site www.mindsetrehab.com.

When I wondered aloud if the mental rehearsal a therapist might ask someone to do is similar to motor imagery, Stevens said there is a parallel, but it depends on the way the imagery is used. To activate neurocircuitry, people need to imagine from a first-person perspective, rather than the perspective of an observer. It may not be enough, in other words, to just visualize yourself doing something. The difference sounds subtle, but the point of view matters in terms of rebuilding paths in the brain.

“So long as there is a focus on the person to actually feel what it is like, and then to complete the movement, then it’s just like the motor imagery I’m talking about,” said Stevens. “If the person is adopting a more of an observer perspective, then it may not be the same in terms of neurocircuitry activated.”

Regardless of the clinical differences between imagery and visualization, people are using both of these tools in all kinds of settings. A movement coach in San Francisco, Isa Isaacs, uses mental imagery with her clients and applied it to herself when she couldn’t practice her craft of flow arts because of an injury. Once she was recovered, she found that the act of imagining performing her movements led to a greater range of motion.

Aliesa George from the Centerworks Pilates Institute in Witchita, Kan., has experience working with people who have suffered loss of function. George targets her exercises, and the language she uses to describe corresponding
Conflicts of Interest
By Patricio Figueroa, Jr.

Boards of directors of not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) and for-profit corporations are frequently engaged in defining conflicts of interest. And from state to state, there are slight variations of those definitions. There are also different types of conflict of interest, some very egregious, others that don’t even rise to the level of an insult.

The widely used definition of conflict of interest goes something like this: a situation in which someone in a position of trust, such as an executive director of not-for-profit or a chief executive officer of a corporation, has competing professional or personal interests. The emphasis is on the latter part of the definition.

In college, I heard the old joke that conflict of interest was the equivalent of “seeing your mother-in-law drive off a cliff with your brand-new Cadillac.” As tragic, conflicting and personal as that sounds, it best describes what psychologists would call “cognitive dissonance,” anxiety that results from simultaneously holding contradictory or otherwise incompatible attitudes or beliefs. The connection between cognitive dissonance and conflict of interest may include attitudes and beliefs, and also the awareness of one’s behavior.

Avoiding conflict of interest involves management and the responsibility of being objective in protecting the public interest, putting aside personal motives and inclinations, and keeping all decisions transparent. An example would be an executive director in need of a good accountant. That director has a brother who is an experienced accountant but who is unemployed, and he knows the board would not approve the hiring for fear of “collusion” — and rightfully so.

The public’s trust, transparency and avoidance of any appearance of impropriety are crucial to NPOs.

Everyone involved in an NPO must keep in mind that an overriding criterion for certification as a charity is that no one may benefit (financially or personally) from being involved in a management or oversight position. Obviously, employees, including the chief executive officer, may be compensated at a “reasonable level.” But it is illegal to gain financially by serving on the board or management.

A type of conflict of interest that commonly occurs involves engaging an attorney or accounting firm that has an individual on the board of directors of the organization. In the event of a settlement, however, the board member or his firm may gain financially. This means that this attorney’s firm, and possibly the attorney board member, will benefit from serving on the NPO’s board.

I have seen this with NPOs that do advocacy in special education. A board member is an attorney who volunteers to pursue litigation on behalf of the organization. When the case is over, the attorney or his firm often benefit from the publicity generated by the case and may also win attorney’s fees, or a portion of the settlement. This is not legal. To give board members of NPOs compensation, as in one case I discovered, the organization was paying for a health insurance plan for board members. This was also found to be illegal.

While NPOs are allowed to earn a profit, more accurately called a surplus, such earnings are retained by the organization for its future provision of programs and services and are not owned by or distributed to individuals or stakeholders.

Whether it has stakeholders (NPOs) or stockholders, the goal of both types of entities is identical: to increase the wealth of the organizations involved.

Patricio Figueroa, Jr. is an artist, author, advocate and co-founder of Independence Today. He was also the first director of a center for independent living (CIL) in New York state. If you have a question write to patfigny@aol.com.

Resources for Nonprofit Organizations

Given the current recession, budget cuts and economic uncertainty facing many service organizations, Independence Today is providing source information where items ranging from software to computers to soy toner may be purchased.

TechSoup.Org provides a range of technology services for nonprofits, including news and articles, discussion forums and discounted and donated technology products. To take full advantage of TechSoup’s services, organizations can register at http://www.techsoup.org/index.cfm. At the end of January, TechSoup Global will become TechSoup Canada. At that time, service for Canadian organizations will be managed through a new in-country partner, the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) in Toronto.

The Rev. Bernard McCoy and four other monks sworn to a life of prayer, austerity and charity at the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Spring Bank sell remanufactured inkjet or laser-printer cartridges from an Internet site and telephone mail-order center at discounts greater than most large office-supply stores. Products include copier supplies, fax supplies, inkjet refill kits, cartridge, inkjets, printer ribbons and more, including environmentally friendly soy toner.


If you know of a Web site with discounted products, services (such as low-cost video conferencing) or technology for organizations or people with disabilities, send it to us at: iTodaynews@ilchv.org.
In 2003, Kimmel ended his Fox News show by saying: “Aren’t midgets fun? Everyone should own one.” That crass crack is seared in the memory of many people with dwarfism. Kimmel’s comment typifies a slow-to-change societal attitude that deems people of short stature as appropriate targets of mocking, laughter or more serious abuse.

Joe Stramondo has noted changing societal attitudes and stereotypes about dwarfs. “There have been shifts in how dwarfism is presented in the media,” says Stramondo, a 26-year-old student pursuing a doctorate in philosophy at Michigan State University. Since he began using a wheelchair, he identifies more as a person with a disability than as a person of short stature.

“Cultural representation is changing as typified by Meredith Eaton’s role in ‘Boston Legal.’ She has been successful in getting cast in a mainstream role. Her dwarfism isn’t the point; the story of the script is.”

Stramondo, active with the Michigan chapter of ADAPT, suggests that people examine their own stereotypes when deciding what constitutes good cultural representation.

“It’s easy to define good representation as a college-educated Caucasian male who happens to have dwarfism. We have to think creatively and not demonize people different from us. Circus clowns aren’t evil. It’s fine if that’s your desire but a shame if it is the only choice open to you.”

Stramondo, a facile communicator with a good sense of humor, seems to understand both the cross-disability world and the legislative or public-policy remedies.

Although the mainstream culture’s view of people with dwarfism as objects at whom to point and laugh is deeply rooted, that may be changing.

Telesca notes that this decade has seen an exponential increase in media treatments of their issues. “With the Roloff show and other publicity, society is being ‘little people’d to death,” she says. “There have been numerous documentaries. Each has added a little to the story.”

The energy, creativity and drive of Maria Telesca, Matt Roloff and Joe Stramondo are powerful, though differently focused. Each is a strong leader. And with a shift in public attitudes, they and others like them hope to point society on a path that is more inclusive of people with dwarfism.

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Janine Bertram Kemp is a writer and longtime disability rights activist who has been involved with the Real Choice Systems Change federal program and the Money Follows the Person initiative. The Oregon resident is a board member of the National Coalition of Disability Rights and the Disability Rights Center.

The incoming administration supports vocational rehabilitation programs for students with disabilities who graduate from high school to help them face the unique challenges that may prevent them from going to college or getting a job, such as obtaining funding.

Obama and Biden want to improve college opportunities for high school graduates with disabilities, make college more affordable, strengthen community colleges and begin a comprehensive study of students with disabilities who make the transition to work and higher education.

Vigilance to End Discrimination

To end discrimination of the disabled and promote equal opportunity, the new administration proposes to 1) restore the Americans with Disabilities Act, 2) appoint judges and justices who respect laws designed to protect people with disabilities, 3) increase funding for enforcement, 4) support the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), which prohibits discrimination “on the basis of genetic information by employers and health insurers” and the disclosure of genetic information, 5) guarantee health care coverage and 6) improve mental health care.

Obama supports the ADA Restoration Act -- championed by Senator Tom Harkin, D-Iowa – that seeks to overturn recent Supreme Court decisions that limited the ADA’s coverage and effectiveness. The president-elect has promised to sign the bill into law.

Obama and Biden have promised to “fully fund and increase staffing” for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) “to reduce charge backlogs and to prosecute efforts to remedy systemic discrimination.” In addition, Obama will appoint a chairperson of the EEOC and nominate commissioners “who are committed to enforcing anti-discrimination laws.”

Concerning health care, the new administration

Obama Continued on page 12
is proposing a plan to: 1) provide a subsidy to help people with disabilities who lose their Medicare or Medicaid coverage to purchase new coverage, 2) prevent insurers from denying coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions and 3) offer coverage for serious mental illnesses on the same terms and conditions as other illnesses and diseases. In addition, the president-elect has promised that veterans will have mental health care during recruitment, deployment and re-entry into civilian life.

**Increased Employment of PWDs**

Obama and Biden note that the federal government is the United States' largest employer and, as such, “it must recruit, hire, retain and advance workers with disabilities.” To achieve this end, Obama will reestablish Executive Order 13173 (issued but not fulfilled by President Bill Clinton before he left office), mandating the hiring of 100,000 federal employees with disabilities within five years; designate a senior White Office official to assure that all federal departments and agencies meet the mandate; and make sure that “all electronic and information technologies employed by the federal government are fully accessible to federal employees and members of the general public with disabilities, as required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.”

To assure the enforcement of affirmative action in employment for adults with disabilities, Obama “will direct all of his department and agency heads to bring their agencies into full compliance with all aspects of the Rehabilitation Act and adopt regulations (that) assure that result."

Obama and Biden have said that they “will launch an aggressive effort” to educate employers about tax benefits that accrue to those who hire more PWD. They have also said that they will establish a National Commission on People with Disabilities, Employment and Social Security, which will include presidential and congressional appointees, the commissioner of the Social Security Administration and the secretaries of the U.S. Labor Department and federal Department of Health and Human Services as ex-officio members. Their mandate will be to:

- Examine and propose solutions to work disincentives in the SSDI, SSI, Medicare and Medicaid programs.
- Revisit the Ticket to Work Act.
- Look for opportunities to improve the relationships between DDSI and the SSI programs and the Workforce investment and vocational rehabilitation systems.
- Examine the SSDI and SSI benefits levels in view of available work opportunities for PWD who are of working age.
- Redefine the “substantial gainful activity” level in the SSDI program and “whether it should indexed to average hourly wages or some other measure.”
- Study programs that help young people obtain work rather than join the SSI rolls.

In addition, Obama and Biden will seek to support small businesses owned by PWD and grant workers with disabilities and family caregivers the flexibility at work they need. They hope to accomplish the latter by expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act, encouraging states to adopt paid leave, mandating a reasonable amount of paid sick leave and protecting against caregiver discrimination.

**Support of Independent, Community-Based Living**

Obama and Biden pledge to develop incentives for states to provide PWD the ability to choose the most appropriate care for their individual needs. The incentives include additional grants for new communities and community expansions.

The Community Choice Act and direct care workers will be a priority in the new administration. This means that community direct care services must be expanded, pay and benefits increased and more flexibility extended to direct care workers.

Obama and Biden support the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act so as to “create a voluntary, budget-neutral national insurance program to help adults who have or develop functional disabilities to remain independent and in their communities.”

They agree that the Social Security approval process must be streamlined and that more staff and technology are needed to expedite final decisions. They say that the voting rights of Americans with disabilities must be protected and voting must be accessible for the elderly and handicapped. Obama strenuously opposes voter ID laws requiring mandatory photo identification at polling places because, he said, it has the effect of “disproportionately disenfranchising Americans with disabilities, more than 3 million of whom lack a government-issued form of identification.”

Amending the Medicare “homebound” rule, investing in assistive technologies, protecting the safety of individuals with special needs, supporting Americans with autism spectrum disorders and strengthening Veterans Administration specialty care are all issues on the Obama agenda.

Brenda Brown-Grooms is an independent living coordinator with the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center in Roanoke, Va.
homes and 31 percent on community. Billions of dollars have gone from nursing homes to the community.

IT: What was a damaging case that you lost?

Gold: Three Rivers Center for Independent Living v. Pittsburgh Housing Authority, 2004. We claimed that the housing authority violated the 504 (regulations) by not having 5 percent accessible units. The court held we could not enforce the 5 percent requirement -- only HUD could. We amended our complaint, sued only under the 504 statute directly and not the (regulations), and got the Housing Authority to agree to 7 percent. However, the legal principle we lost really hurts! It’s been adversely cited in my cases.

IT: ADAPT-type activists don’t like to rely too heavily on lawsuits because fickle courts put too many factors beyond their control. What do you think of that?

Gold: What an understatement! I agree 100 percent. But it’s more nuanced. Lawsuits should be one handle in a political struggle, but too often people, including people with disabilities, stop the political actions and rely on the lawsuit and lawyers!

IT: What impact, good and bad, have lawyers and lawsuits had on the movement?

Gold: Too many lawyers, including disability lawyers, do not understand that our type of litigation is a part of a political struggle and movement and as such must be controlled by this movement. The welfare rights movement died in the early 1970s, in my opinion, because the movement depended too heavily on the lawyers and forgot the grass-roots actions, and the lawyers

**SABE Chief Plans to Expand Advocacy Efforts**

By Susan Cohen

According to Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), self-advocacy organizations are in every state in the U.S. They are composed of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want the same choices, opportunities and responsibilities as other United States citizens.

Each self-advocacy association has its own board of directors and its own agenda, which focuses on issues important to its members. These issues include housing, transportation, employment, voting access and independence in the community, among others.

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered, formed in 1991, is composed of representatives of all the self-advocacy associations in the United States, divided into nine regions. SABE representatives meet four times a year and have a national conference every two years. The next conference is in 2011 in Washington, D.C.

SABE’s organizational mission is to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equals and given the same choices, rights, responsibilities and opportunities to speak up as anyone else, in addition to the opportunities to make new friends and to learn from their mistakes.

SABE, in conjunction with other disability organizations, pushed hard for the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, which was passed in September. It also co-sponsored two presidential forums, one in New Hampshire and one in Ohio, according to Chester Finn, president of SABE. The forums marked the first time the disability community demanded and was granted involvement in presidential politics.

In September elections, Finn, a resident of Albany, N.Y., was chosen president for a third term and Tia Nelis of Chicago was chosen vice president.

“Traditionally, individuals with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities have been consistently surrounded by the misperception that we are not able,” said Finn, a veteran Washington, D.C., advocate. “Therefore, when well-meaning parents and professionals advocate for us in Washington, the things we really need, such as living independently in the community with the appropriate supports, being employed competitively and getting equal access to voting, … have not been communicated properly.” A demonstration of advocacy by “well meaning others” is the 70% unemployment rate among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Finn said.

**WRITERS WANTED**

INDEPENDENCE TODAY IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE INTERESTED IN WRITING OR REPORTING FOR THE PUBLICATION. WE ARE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN WRITERS IN WASHINGTON, D.C., THE NEW YORK CITY AREA, AND CALIFORNIA. WRITERS ARE PAID. PLEASE CONTACT US AT: ITODAYNEWS@ILCHV.ORG THANK YOU.

SABE continued on page 14
A woman I know has worked with visualization largely on her own. Sixteen years ago, Margaret Leatham had her first arterial venous malformation, or AVM. Currently, she is recovering from her seventh surgery, working hard in physical, occupational and speech therapies to regain function and strength. Part of the loss is related to her latest surgery, but she is also continuing to address weakness she developed on her right side more than a decade ago following radiation treatments.

“I have really educated myself about the mechanics of movement,” Leatham said in a phone interview. Her speaking is slow and measured, marking the time it takes to calculate her thoughts and turn them into the right words.

“Mainly this is from yoga, although I bought myself several books of anatomy and physiology to know the mechanics of movement. So I know my body in a much deeper sense than I ever did. Now, probably for the last three or four years, I know that I have to move my hip in a certain way. I can’t let my knee hyperextend, so I’m really aware. I have to be aware that I’m lifting my toe. There’s so much involved in walking, it’s like a miracle every time we take a step. It’s amazing that the brain controls all the movements, so I get excited about this. So I visualize this movement, and in thinking about it -- I’ve never really spoken it before -- I think I can do a better job at it in the sense that I can pull on my other tools.”

In speaking with Margaret, I can imagine her visualizing every movement, but I have little comprehension of the difficulties she and my father face. I’m humbled by the body and grateful that people are experimenting with motor imagery and visualization on their own and in medical and research settings. Once my able-bodiedness is revised, perhaps I’ll be able to take advantage of further understanding in the field.

Amy Halloran is a writer who lives in upstate New York with her sons and husband.

“"In the language of the current DD (Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights) Act, competitive employment is not supported. Therefore, the focus of many disability provider organizations is to keep people in sheltered workshops, doing work by the piece in warehouse settings. This is not acceptable and needs to be changed." Finn said his goals for SABE are to:

1. Bring in funding for the first time from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities to self-advocacy organizations around the country to start information and training centers. These funds typically go to developmental disability councils, protection and advocacy offices, and university centers.

2. Change the language in the Developmental Disabilities Act and the Rehab Act to support competitive employment among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The current language supports people not working and focuses on raises for support professionals.

3. Provide a large-scale grass-roots education of parents, service providers and lawmakers to let them know what people with intellectual and developmental disabilities want and need.

4. Continue to push for equal voting access among individuals with disabilities.

5. Push for the closing of group homes and institutions that do not provide community integration opportunities.

6. Push for affordable housing along with a coalition of other disability organizations.

Asked if SABE will work with other disability organizations on a general disability agenda, Finn said his organization will work on certain issues where there is common ground, on certain issues where there is common ground, such as voting access, but will continue to advocate for the specific needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“We do not want our needs to continue to get lost between the cracks in Washington,” he said.

“In order for the DD Act to be rewritten, self-advocates need to rewrite it. We can no longer depend on our parents, care providers or informed lawmakers to represent our needs. They do not live our lives. That is why the work SABE does is so important. SABE organizes at the grassroots and gets the voices of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities heard and treated with respect.”

For more information, go to www.SABE.org.

Susan Cohen is an independent consultant focusing on accessibility issues. She can be contacted at sdaretodream@aol.com.

Census: 54.4 Million Americans Have a Disability

About one in five U.S. residents - 19 percent - reported some level of disability in 2005, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report recently released. These 54.4 million Americans are roughly equal to the combined total populations of California and Florida.

Both the number and percentage of people with disabilities were higher than in 2002, the last time the Census Bureau collected such information. At that time, 51.2 million, or 18 percent, reported a disability.

Among those with a disability, 35 million, or 12 percent of the population, were classified as having a severe disability, according to Americans with Disabilities: 2005.

Nearly half (46 percent) of people age 21 to 64 with a disability were employed, compared with 84 percent of people in this age group without a disability. Among those with disabilities, 31 percent with severe disabilities and 75 percent with non-severe disabilities were employed. People with difficulty hearing were more likely to be employed than those with difficulty seeing (59 percent compared with 41 percent). A portion of people with disabilities — 11 million
Census
Continued from page 14

age 6 and older — needed personal assistance with everyday activities. These activities include such tasks as getting around inside the home, taking a bath or shower, preparing meals and performing light housework.

Other important findings:

- Among people 15 and older, 7.8 million (3 percent) had difficulty hearing a normal conversation, including 1 million being unable to hear at all. Although not part of the definition of disability used in the report, 4.3 million people reported using a hearing aid.
- Roughly 3.3 million people, or 1 percent, age 15 and older used a wheelchair or similar device, with 10.2 million, or 4 percent, using a cane, crutches or walker.
- Nearly 7.8 million people age 15 and older had difficulty seeing words or letters in ordinary newspaper print, including 1.8 million being completely unable to see.
- More than 16 million people had difficulty with cognitive, mental or emotional functioning. This included 8.4 million with one or more problems that interfere with daily activities, such as frequently being depressed or anxious, trouble getting along with others, trouble concentrating and trouble coping with stress.
- The chances of having a disability increase with age: 18.1 million people 65 and older, or 52 percent, had a disability. Of this number, 12.9 million, or 37 percent, had a severe disability. For people 80 and older, the disability rate was 71 percent, with 56 percent having a severe disability.
- Among people 16 to 64, 13.3 million, or 7 percent, reported difficulty finding a job or remaining employed because of a health-related condition.
- Among people 25 to 64 with a severe disability, 27 percent were in poverty, compared with 12 percent for people with a non-severe disability and 9 percent for those without a disability.
- Median monthly earnings were $1,458 for people with a severe disability, $2,250 for people with a non-severe disability and $2,539 for those with no disability.
- Parents reported that 228,000 children under age 3, or 2 percent, had a disability. Specifically, they either had a developmental delay or difficulty moving their arms or legs. In addition, there were 475,000 children 3 to 5 years, or 4 percent, with a disability, which meant they had either a developmental delay or difficulty walking, running or playing.
- There were 4.7 million children 6 to 14, or 13 percent, with a disability. The most prevalent type was difficulty doing regular coursework (2.5 million, or 7 percent).

The Survey of Income and Program Participation produces national-level estimates for the U.S. resident population and subgroups and allows for the observation of trends over time, particularly of selected characteristics such as income, eligibility for and participation in transfer programs, household and family composition, labor force behavior and other associated events.

Note to NYC Board of Elections Chief: You HAVA Major Polling Site Problem!

This is a copy of an e-mail sent recently to the NYC Board of Elections. It has been edited for space.

Mr. Marcus Cedarqvist, Executive Director
Board of Elections in the City of New York
32 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10004

Dear Mr. Cedarqvist,

This past Election Day, November 4th, I went to my polling site at 74 Van Cortlandt Park South in the Bronx, New York, to use what is called a ballot marking device (BMD). The machine, which has a touch screen, is supposed to allow people with disabilities a mechanism to vote independently. I am dismayed that despite the state buying the BMD machines, I encountered serious difficulties in attempting to cast my vote. Some of the issues are with the machine itself, but more frustrating is the lack of sensitivity, respect or civility offered to me and my personal care assistant by the Democratic site coordinator.

On arriving at my polling place, I asked if there was a BMD on site. The first poll worker gave me a blank stare and called for one of the site coordinators. The Democratic coordinator, Ms. Trinidad Lopez, came to the front desk, and again I requested to use the BMD.

I have cerebral palsy, use a wheelchair and have a speech disability, yet most of the time I can get my points across. (I worked for 20 years as the founding executive director of Bronx Independent Living Services. While there, I performed many functions, including public speaking.) It is my style to encourage people to ask me to repeat myself if they are having trouble with my speech. But the Democratic site coordinator just refused to listen to me -- even when I directly requested she do so. Her blank statement, in a scream, was, “I cannot understand you.” After that, she wouldn’t look at me when I spoke. I wonder: If I were speaking in a foreign language, would she have treated me in such a dismissive manner?

I purposely brought along my personal care assistant (home attendant) to make sure I would be able to communicate and get my request for the BMD machine met. My personal care assistant repeated my request to use the machine. Ms. Lopez yelled questions to my personal assistant. She tried to convince me through my assistant that my vote would not be counted today if I used the BMD, although my information via the disabled community said the exact opposite. Then she stated that my personal assistant could easily take me into the polling booth and pull the levers for me. I just shook...
Kelly Buckland
Appointed NCIL's New Executive Director

This new year is a time of transition for our nation and for NCIL. In December, as President-Elect Barack Obama contemplated key appointments to the new administration, the NCIL Governing Board completed an exhaustive search and selection process in appointing Kelly Buckland to replace John Lancaster, who is retiring to his home in upstate New York.

Buckland will bring with him a career of experience in the independent living movement and the field of disability rights. He has matured in his career from his days as a social worker in Boise and an employee for Idaho's protection and advocacy system. He served for years as the executive director of the Boise CIL, Living Independence Network Corp. He currently heads the Idaho State Independent Living Council. He has served on the Idaho Developmental Disabilities Council, the State Employment and Training Council and the state’s Help America Vote Act Steering Committee.

In 1978, Buckland graduated from Boise State University with a B.A. in social work; in 1988 he graduated Summa Cum Laude from Drake University with a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling. In recent years, Buckland has been honored with numerous state and national awards, including the University of Idaho President’s Medallion, the United Vision for Idaho Lifetime Achievement Award, the Hewlett-Packard Distinguished Achievement in Human Rights Award, and induction into the National Spinal Cord Injury Hall of Fame.

Additionally, Buckland is no stranger to NCIL. He has served on numerous NCIL legislative and advocacy subcommittees and other standing NCIL committees, and the NCIL Governing Board since 1998. He was NCIL vice president from 2001-2005 and NCIL president from 2006 to the present. Buckland will officially take over as NCIL’s executive director on May 15, 2009, and will serve as NCIL president until his term expires at NCIL’s 2009 annual Meeting of the Members in early June. Lancaster and Buckland will be working closely together in the first 4½ months of 2009 to ensure a smooth and effective transition of executive directors.

Buckland, his wife, Merle, and their son Rodney will relocate to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area following the conclusion of Rodney’s school year.

The NCIL staff feels privileged to have Buckland as their new leader. His experience, insight, vision and proven leadership is what NCIL needs to direct its operations in this challenging time of national financial, political and cultural change. Please join us in welcoming NCIL’s new executive director, Kelly J. Buckland!

Provided by NCIL staff

NYC Board
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my head.

At that point, I was convinced that neither she nor any of the staff had received any training pertaining to use of the ballot marking device. I believe, therefore, that she was working hard to get me and any other disabled voters who might follow me to use the general voting machines. Lopez totally washed her hands of me, requesting that the Republican site coordinator handle the issue: me.

The Republican site coordinator escorted me over to the BMD machine, which was placed in the narrowest spot in the back of the auditorium. Not being an expert motorized wheelchair driver, I had difficulty maneuvering to get myself directly in front of the screen so that I could operate the machine.

The second site coordinator, who was trying quite hard to be cooperative and nice, had a manual for the BMD, but instead of telling me how to use the machine and giving me privacy to vote on my own, she stood there explaining how it worked and watched every entry I marked on my “private” ballot. The first time we tried to print it, the ballot came out blank. We repeated everything a second time; this time we received a printed ballot.

Like every American, I have the right to vote. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) allows me to vote in the most accessible manner possible. I do not understand why someone at my local voting site tried so hard to take this right from me. How can we make sure that such a horrible incident never occurs again?

Sincerely,

Barbara Bobbi Linn
bblin@aol.com

For important disability news daily, go to: independentliving-usa.com
or give us a link on your home page. Or
www.itodaynews.com

For a complete news roundup, go to:
www.itodaynews.com
News Briefs supplied by David Reynolds from Inclusion Daily Express.

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