

New Horizons

Housing | nat Supports Independence

Congratulations to All Our 2018 Angel Award Gala Honorees:



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Freedom Bell Award
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Stephen Gruzlovic, Project
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“My Two Cents”

By *Tim Doherty, Executive Director*



Well it's that time of year again, Christmas Time, which seems to roll around so fast....seems like I just put the lights away and now I have to put them back up again. Anyway, it is a happy chore, as I certainly do love this time of year.

It also is a busy time of the year, for me personally and for our Project Freedom staff at our various housing communities. Each of our communities have Christmas parties which are paid for by Project Freedom and often include some Christmas gifts. These gifts are usually supplied by some of our “angels”, either families or individuals or local businesses. These “Angels” will purchase and fill a goodie bag, with various staples as well as some toys and clothes for the kids in these families. This tradition has been going on for some time now, and I know that our families look forward to this event each year.

Along with the party, food and gifts, we try to coordinate some special events, such as the Lawrence Community Band which plays at our Lawrence location each Christmas time. I am told that the band really enjoys playing for our Lawrence community who thoroughly enjoy their music. Esther and Maria try to coordinate some transportation from our other sites, so that we can open this event to as many folks who want to attend.

Other events usually include a trip at night to a local farm or entertainment venue, such as Core Creek, in Pa. to view the Christmas lights and displays. Our family tries to do that one on our own, as it really makes the holidays special seeing all the lights and sounds of the season. These events are special things that our staff does on their own time, often after hours. They also decorate our community centers so that our housing continues to keep the spirit of Christmas for everyone to enjoy.

And I guess that is what makes this time of year so special. Christmas Time is a time that we share our concern for each other...we give gifts, enjoy a good meal, and each one's company. It is this caring about each other.....it may be only a “Merry Christmas” as we pass by, or it may be an offer to share a meal, or sing carols...but whatever it is, it is an expression of love or concern for each other. What a beautiful thing it would be if we could keep that kind of feeling for one another, all during the year.

It is also a time of remembrance of our loved ones who have passed, and who are no longer with us. For me, I try to remember the good times, rather than dwell on the bad. Yes there is sadness, but also when I remember the love that those folks shared on me, I remember their goodness and that makes me happy.

So, as we go through this Christmas season, let's try to spread that Christmas spirit to all we encounter. I think that if we do, each of us will also experience a very “Merry Christmas”.

Blessings to all.

From Norman's Desk



December is a time of celebration and gift giving. My gift to our readers is a short column so other news can have my space.

The Holiday Season is both a time for giving and saying thanks. Project Freedom has a lot of supporters, and we thank each of you for giving us your support throughout the year.

We have had another successful year with Freedom Villages under construction for West Windsor and Gibbsboro to bring 144 more apartments online by 2020. We were also approved for 72 more units in a completely separate complex in our hometown of Robbinsville to start construction next year.

We also held two great fundraising events, and we have held many refreshing recreational trips and programs run by dedicated staff and resourceful volunteers. We thank all that participated. You make Project Freedom strong and productive.

Project Freedom is moving forward into our 35th year of advocating for people with disabilities exercising their right to live in the community.

This is the season for giving, and if you are so inclined to give to Project Freedom, it is not too late to become a 2018 Supporter! Your gift will be appreciated and acknowledged by yours truly.

Project Freedom is an AmazonSmile charity, and you may select us if you participate in that program as you buy gifts. Go to smile.amazon.com/ch/22-2532804 and Amazon donates to Project Freedom Inc.

Meanwhile, I hope all of readers have wonderful and joyous holidays, receive the gift of peace and love, and have the companionship of those dearest to you.

Norman A. Smith,
Follow me on Twitter @normansmith02
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Cheerleaders With Disabilities Enjoy Recognition, And Camaraderie

by Eric Lagatta, Reprinted from The Columbus Dispatch/TNS | November 13, 2018



COLUMBUS, Ohio — Under the Friday night lights of the football stadium at Independence High School, Lauren Flynn rallied her pep squad.

Just minutes into the game against the Marion-Franklin Red Devils, the Independence 76ers had marched into the opposing team's territory, and the crowd needed a little coaxing to come alive.

"All right, ya'll, let's hear an I-H-S!" Flynn shouted at the group of six cheerleaders assembled on the track near the 50-yard line. After Flynn led a count-off of "5, 6, 7, 8," the students — pompoms in hand — chanted "I-H-S! Hey, we're the best!"

Decked out in 76ers colors and sporting other signs of their school loyalty, the Sparklers — cheerleaders with physical and mental disabilities,

including some who use wheelchairs and walkers — perform during the first quarter of every home football game for Independence, a Columbus high school on the Southeast Side.

Never failing to exude school spirit, the Sparklers — overseen by Flynn and Sam Wyatt, another Independence special education teacher — are a fan favorite. "They always just get a huge ovation from the crowd, and it seems like everyone is watching them," said Nicole Chavers, a special education teacher at the high school and founder of the squad. "They love every single minute of it."

Chavers formed the Sparklers in 2012 after watching a segment on NBC Nightly News about the Sparkle Effect, a national organization with the mission of involving students with developmental disabilities in sports and other school activities. "I thought it was wonderful," she said.

The Sparklers originated with five members in the fall of 2013. The current squad has seven members — senior Rebecca Breedlove, 18; senior Dalaney Banks, 18; junior Diamond Jackson, 17; junior Tamara Perry, 19; sophomore Niani Moon, 15; freshman Priscilla Jenkins, 15; and senior De'Ontay Sanders, 20 — whose disabilities range from orthopedic impairments to cerebral palsy.

Although the Sparklers aren't accredited through the national organization — some of the guidelines, such as a requirement that activities be offered throughout the academic year, aren't feasible for the school — its mission mirrors that of the Sparkle Effect. It is also the only such group within Columbus City Schools, district spokeswoman Jacqueline Bryant said. "These types of team efforts are examples of how we meet our students' needs and interests while advancing our commitment to provide engaging and rewarding opportunities for all students," Bryant said in an email.

Chavers coached the group until two years ago, when she stepped down to spend more time with her family. Flynn and Wyatt said the visibility of the Sparklers boosts members' sense of belonging and their self-esteem. "They love the recognition," Wyatt said. "They feel a part of a team. They feel they're just as much a part of the school as everyone else." Added Flynn: "It's great for them to have something that's theirs only. They have a lot of ownership of that."

The Sparklers perform at pep rallies and football games, often joined for some chants by the varsity cheerleading squad — the Liberty Belles.

The coaches are exploring the possibility of introducing the Sparklers to other sports, including basketball. The group's members say they enjoy the camaraderie and the adrenaline rush of being in front of the crowd during games. "I like to cheer with my friends, my beautiful friends," Jackson said. "It's fun." Jenkins said she enjoys pumping up the crowd. "I get them very excited," said Jenkins, who is often joined at games by her 4-year-old sister, Gabriella.

At the most recent home game — a 14-12 loss for the 76ers — Jenkins wore a hand-sewn uniform made by her mom, Beatriz Jenkins, who stood by the fence near the Sparklers with other parents eager to support the cheerleaders. "I'm happy seeing her thriving," Beatriz Jenkins said. "It gives them an opportunity to do something they love to do that is sometimes unobtainable."



Lawrence Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
5-Dec	Wed	Hamilton/Lawrence Shopping	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
5-Dec	Wed	Massages	As scheduled
5-Dec	Wed	Nutrition	7.00 PM
6-Dec	Thu	People & Stories	1-2:30 PM
6-Dec	Thu	Holiday Lawrence Community Band Concert @7PM	Bus Leaves PFR 5:30 PM
7-Dec	Fri	Lawrence Holiday Crafts	Prog. Time 4:00 -7:00 PM
10-Dec	Mon	Yoga	4:00 PM
12-Dec	Wed	Tenant Holiday Party	4:00 PM
14-Dec	Fri	Lawrence Winter Crafts	Prog. Time 4:00 -6:30 PM
19-Dec	Wed	Lawrence Baking with Dana	Prog. Time 4:00 -7:00 PM



Do You Know Anyone Who Has a Passenger CDL License and Would Like to Volunteer to Drive for Our Various Rec Programs?





Hamilton Happenings

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
5-Dec	Wed	Hamilton/Lawrence Shopping	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
5-Dec	Wed	Hamilton Holiday Crafts	Prog. Time 5:00 -8:00 PM
7-Dec	Fri	Hamilton Holiday Games	Prog. Time 1 PM-3 PM
14-Dec	Fri	Hamilton Winter Craft	Prog. Time 12:30 -3:30 PM
20-Dec	Thu	Hamilton Baking with Dana	Prog. Time 5:00 -8:00 PM



Robbinsville Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
13-Dec	Thu	Robbinsville Holiday Crafts	Prog. Time 6:30 -9:00 PM
19-Dec	Wed	Robbinsville Pretzel Making	Prog. Time 12:30 -2:30 PM
22-Dec	Sat	Robbinsville Holiday Party	Prog. Time 5:00 PM



Hopewell Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
4-Dec	Mon	Northfield Bank Credit and Service Presentation	3:00 PM
6-Dec	Thur	Heart to Hearts Chair Massage	1:15 PM - 3:30 PM
14-Dec	Fri	Mercer Home Health Hosting Pokeno	3:00 PM
19-Dec	Wed	Tenant Meeting and Holiday Gathering	4:00 -7:00 PM
20-Dec	Thur	Heart to Hearts Chair Massage	9:30– 11:00 AM

500,000 Teens With ASD Are Headed To Adulthood. Where Will They Work? by Suzanne Garofalo, Houston Chronicle/TNS | November 16, 2018

HOUSTON — When Olivia Shanks landed in the hospital, it changed her life.

She didn't arrive as a patient, though — she came to work. The 21-year-old, who has high-functioning autism, has struggled to get places on time. Some basic workplace tasks stressed her out. Dependence on others dinged her self-confidence.

Her work in Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital's food-services department came via one of Houston's nonprofit groups providing job training and support for a population that's exploding but finds few opportunities to live as fully as possible.

"I basically learned everything here. I didn't know how to organize silverware," said Shanks, who also learned about teamwork and following a schedule. "Even though I'm still not good at it, I've gotten less scatterbrained with time management or pressure."

The climb of autism diagnoses is alarming. This year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention upped its estimate to 1 in 59 U.S. births — twice the 2004 rate of 1 in 125. National advocacy group Autism Speaks estimates 500,000 teens with autism will reach adulthood over the next 10 years.

Yet nearly half of 25-year-olds with the disorder have never held a paying job, according to Autism Speaks. Ninety percent of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed.

Some are too impacted to work once they age out of school-based vocational services by 22. But many who could work face depression and isolation, idle on their parents' couch, financially dependent on them, government or community organizations. Research shows job activities that encourage independence reduce symptoms and increase daily living skills.

Autism spectrum disorder is a complex developmental disability. Symptoms typically appear in early childhood and inhibit communication and interaction to varying degrees. Though some of the increase in incidences can be attributed to better diagnosis, the cause remains unknown.

In Houston and elsewhere, autism-focused groups are promoting workplace inclusion. They collaborate with employers and tout the untapped potential of those whose traits include reliability, loyalty and focus.

The business world is beginning to see the benefits.

Maximizing ability

Shanks was 19 before she got an autism diagnosis. Out of high school and out of a routine, she was sitting at home in River Oaks uncertain about her future. But that began to change thanks to Houston nonprofit Social Motion Skills.

The organization offers T3 (Transition, Training, Taxpaying), a program that pairs a job coach with young adults with autism and similar special needs. The workers are eventually weaned off the coach, who stays in touch as issues arise. T3 partners are: Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital; Aspire Accessories, a gift shop where artisans learn light manufacturing, retail and customer service; Clear Lake Infinity, where clients hone interpersonal skills as customers drop off cars for service; FedEx's ground hub in Cypress; and Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Workers are either permanent employees or interns. Both arrangements expose them to direct deposit, banking and paying taxes.

The intern model is low risk: Memorial Hermann, for example, adds to its pool of 275 volunteers while Social Motion Skills pays its interns minimum wage (tuition to the nonprofit to participate covers the job coach's salary).

In the kitchen and cafeteria, job coach Rachel Pasternak worked on sociability with Shanks and two others for six weeks this spring. The goal is "to get them secure enough in themselves to apply for a job — and get it."

Shanks did: Her experience in a hospital setting helped her land a position, with benefits, as a patient transporter at DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Her mother, Stephanie Shanks, said the internship encouraged Olivia to be a self-starter. "She's well on her way to independence," Stephanie said.

At Memorial Hermann, Shanks and her peers got no special treatment, said Elana Hoffman, who oversees the volunteers.

"At first, they were nervous that we were there, but now the staff looks around and notices when we're not," said Stacy Anderson, Social Motion Skills' transition director.

At FedEx's ground hub in Cypress, 13 Social Motion Skills clients unload trailers.

"This is working out very well. For some of these kids, this is their first job, and they don't know really what to expect," senior manager Brady Bates said. With their job coach on hand, they learn the job via a steady, repetitive workflow with few interruptions.

"FedEx believes in diversity and inclusion," Gulf Coast District managing director Clay Roach said. "(This) is a way to not only invest in our community, but afford these kids an opportunity at a real career."

In an op-ed piece for the Houston Business Journal, "Your next great employee might have Autism," Social Motion Skills founder and executive director Wendy Dawson said both employee and employer benefit — when the job is the right fit.

"Roles that require sorting products, performing data entry, or filing draw on the unique strengths of autistic workers, who are usually extremely detail-oriented and procedure-driven," Dawson wrote. "While a non-autistic person might resent the repetitive nature of such tasks, many autistic people truly enjoy this sort of work. Moreover, supervisors can count on them to show up on time and to be loyal employees."

Building their own

The Monarch School and Institute, a private facility for those with special needs in west Houston, teaches children and adults with autism and neurological disabilities. Its Life Academy serves as a “practice center” for home-living and personal skills and employment.

One goal is lessening rigid thinking. “A lot of our learners may see a coworker not following the rules 100 percent, and that may frustrate them,” coordinator Samantha Sanchez said. “We provide our students with tools that they need to stay regulated.”

Historically, employers have voiced concerns: “I don’t think we know how to handle someone like that. What if there’s bullying? Can this individual stand up for themselves?”

Mark Foley defies history. The general manager at MOD Pizza’s west Galleria location has hired several of Monarch’s 15 to 20 off-campus “learners” and holds them accountable like any of his staff. He noted one didn’t work out because he made excuses for slow or poor performance. “Everyone at MOD is special,” Foley said. “Check the disability at the door.” Still, Monarch showed him the need for accommodations, including shorter or fewer shifts. Those are worth the tradeoff for handling tasks most other employees don’t like. Aaron Glick assembles pizza boxes “faster and better than anyone,” Foley said. “The (rest of the) employees love it because they hate folding boxes.”

Sanchez cited a bigger benefit.

“The dependence on (government) assistance is going to have a huge financial impact,” Sanchez said. “When people say things like, ‘It takes so much energy to train them. Is it even worth it?’ It is absolutely worth it.”

Employees with disabilities, including autism, aren’t a drain on business, said Joe Bontke of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s local office. Accommodations save much more than they cost by reducing turnover and down time, he said.

Businesses with \$1 million or less in gross receipts or 30 or fewer employees qualify for a tax write-off for making accommodations. That “sweetens the pot,” Bontke acknowledged, but the employers he’s worked with found “the benefit comes from the understanding that it’s just good for business. They didn’t champion the dollar amount.”

MOD Pizza is 32-year-old Glick’s first job. His two shifts a week include busing tables and refilling silverware containers.

“I’ve been a help to the company, doing what I can do,” he said.

Foley teared up thinking about grateful parents who tell him they fear what will happen to their adult children once they’re gone. “I have to make this work,” he said softly.

On Monarch’s campus, Hannah Hess, 26, spent the summer organizing the new library. For the aspiring writer, earning \$10 an hour surrounded by books was ideal.

“I love being called a bibliophile, not a bookworm because that just sounds gross,” Hess said. Like many with autism, she spoke fervently about her interests but avoided eye contact. Then her phone buzzed. “Ugh, cantankerous phone,” she said. “I love the word ‘cantankerous.’ I’m developing my vocabulary.”

Hess’ phone is Bess. Her tablet is Ned. “I name my devices. Don’t judge me,” she said before turning back to checking out books.

Masters of technology

Nicholas, 19, whipped through screens of light fixtures to choose for a house he was digitally assembling. He studies video-game level design at nonPareil Institute’s Houston facility, which requested its crew members not be fully identified. The institute is a technology-training nonprofit.

Nicholas has communication challenges. “I need to put lights in the bathroom,” he announced without looking up. Asked what his favorite thing is to add to the scene, he didn’t answer. Prompted, he said, “trees on the grass.”

The institute produces games and apps for iOS and Android, along with print and electronic comic books.

“Nonpareil” means “no equal.” The institute harnesses the technology interest common in people with autism. Founded in Plano by Gary Moore and another father who saw a limited future for their own sons, it aims to provide self-sufficiency and a sense of purpose.

“Crew,” as trainees are called, pay tuition to attend. Some also work at nonPareil part time as lab assistants or instructors. Most of the 74 enrolled in Houston are high functioning; a few even hold a degree in computer science.

Code instructor Chris McCrimmons uses his project-management background to get “crew” to break down tasks and review trends — “What was blocking us?” Members respond to the process-driven format, he said.

NonPareil strives to break a defeating job cycle of adults with autism. “They get a part-time job, they’re there a couple of months and start to have issues,” Moore said. Classes address team-building and connecting with others, concepts vital to success in the workplace.

This year staff composed of former crew worked on Trade ‘Em, an app that lets users store, use or trade gift cards. Current crew served as testers. The results led Amarillo-based Trade ‘Em CEO Kristopher Barnings to “show that they are being underutilized.” Next year, Barnings’ support will be to the tune of \$210,000 a month.

Christian Hitz, 26, who has autism, relocated from Plano to work full time as a nonPareil art instructor. If it wasn’t for the teaching job he’d probably be bored working in a warehouse. “This is more fun, more entertaining,” Hitz said. “It’s a relaxed job opportunity.”

In the Houston business world, he is both contributing and being fulfilled.

Christmas Word Search

G	N	E	N	A	C	Y	D	N	A	C	M
I	U	Y	P	C	C	A	R	O	L	S	B
F	D	N	W	V	F	A	C	Y	A	H	D
T	N	K	O	A	N	U	O	L	T	G	W
S	S	R	V	R	N	Y	F	L	N	I	S
S	E	T	E	R	T	I	P	O	A	E	H
Y	T	T	O	E	E	H	K	J	S	L	A
H	S	N	Y	C	D	D	P	U	Z	S	X
O	N	A	E	L	K	N	N	O	Q	M	C
L	E	U	M	M	I	I	I	C	L	R	O
I	E	S	L	T	A	M	N	E	K	E	O
D	R	K	E	F	S	N	A	G	R	J	K
A	G	N	S	L	M	I	R	F	D	V	I
Y	T	X	N	M	C	K	R	O	S	G	E
O	L	Y	I	O	L	Z	B	H	A	Z	S
E	E	R	T	G	V	S	R	H	C	Q	K

TREE
HOLIDAY
GIFTS
STOCKING
SANTA
SLEIGH

REINDEER
JOLLY
CAROLS
COOKIES
RED
GREEN

CHRISTMAS
NORTH POLE
TINSEL
FAMILY
ORNAMENTS
CANDY CANE





December General Recreation Club Freedom Events Highlighted

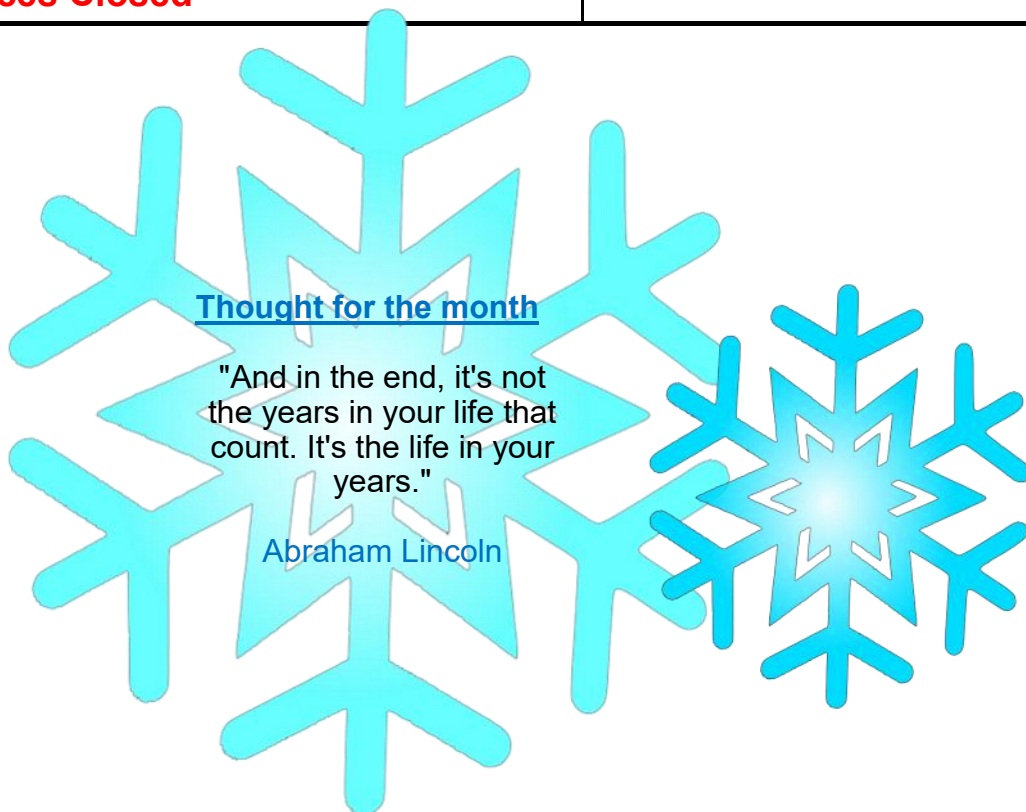
3-Dec	Mon	Day Program - Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
4-Dec	Tue	Holiday Lights - PA 5 Consumers Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 4:30 PM
6-Dec	Thu	Holiday Concert at Lawrence	Bus Leaves PFR 5:00 PM
10-Dec	Mon	Day Program - Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
12-Dec	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
13-Dec	Thu	Mall Trip Moorestown Mall 5 Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
17-Dec	Mon	Day Program - Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
18-Dec	Tue	Mall Trip - Freehold Mall 5 Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
20-Dec	Thu	Columbus Farmers & Flea Market	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
21-Dec	Fri	PF Employee Holiday Party	
24-Dec	Mon	PF Offices Closed Happy Holidays!	
25-Dec	Tue	PF Offices Closed Happy Holidays!	
1-Jan	Tue	PF Offices Closed	



Thought for the month

"And in the end, it's not
the years in your life that
count. It's the life in your
years."

Abraham Lincoln



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Uber Promises More Timely Accessible Rides by Kristin LaFratta, Reprinted from MassLive.com/TNS | November 27, 2018

BOSTON — A new business model by ride-hailing company Uber means quicker pickup times for passengers in wheelchairs in several U.S. cities. Uber's Chief Executive Officer Dara Khosrowshahi announced this month that customers in the Greater Boston area can now access wheelchair-accessible vehicles through Uber with an average pickup wait time of 15 minutes or less.

The announcement comes months after Uber partnered with MV Transportation, a Texas-based company and one of the largest privately-owned passenger transportation firms in the country. The partnership gave Uber access to MV's fleets of drivers and wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

Uber has historically relied on its driver workforce to supply their own cars, which have meant there are few cars that can accommodate wheelchairs. "There simply aren't enough people who personally own WAVs who also choose to drive with Uber," Khosrowshahi said in a statement. He added that in many cities, paratransit options require booking far in advance and long wait times as passengers are picked up and dropped off in various locations.

Uber hopes to change that model by allowing those in wheelchairs to get around as quickly as all passengers. The company says it is investing millions in these services because accessible transportation is a priority. "We'll likely invest tens of millions of dollars into this partnership in the first year," said Uber spokeswoman Alix Anfang. The improved service by Uber is available in Greater Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Chicago and Toronto.

The company hopes to implement improved wheelchair access in San Francisco and Los Angeles this year. The eight cities combined make up for half of all Uber trips in North America, according to Khosrowshahi