

New Horizons

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Opening Soon

Freedom Village at Hamilton Woods

Six Flags Expanding Disability Offerings

Reprinted from DisAbility Scoop Shaun Heasley | July 22, 2022

After enhancing services for visitors with autism, Six Flags is now taking steps to ensure its parks are more welcoming for people with other types of disabilities too.

The theme park company said that it has designed a special restraint harness that allows guests with physical disabilities to access nearly all of its thrill rides.

The harness, which is available in multiple sizes, can accommodate riders with missing limbs and appendages who are at least 54" tall, Six Flags said. About 98% of the theme park's rides have an individually designed harness.

"Six Flags is synonymous with thrills, but safety and inclusivity is the cornerstone of everything we do," said Jason Freeman, vice president of public safety and risk management for Six Flags. "We are proud to implement these key, new safety programs that bring thrills within reach for all guests."

The move to make rides more accessible follows Six Flags' work to be more inclusive of people with autism. In 2020, the company said that all of its North American properties — which now number 27 — were accredited as Certified Autism Centers.

With the designation from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards, the parks offer front-line team members trained to help those with autism and other sensory sensitivities as well as sensory guides for every attraction, low-sensory areas to take breaks, an updated accessibility guide for each park and a program for guests to request assistance or accommodations.

"Six Flags is proud to be the industry leader on these innovative programs that allows our guests to enjoy the more thrilling rides that our parks have to offer," said Selim Bassoul, president and chief executive officer for Six Flags, who said the new offerings show "our unwavering commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion."



People ride the Revolution roller coaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, Calif. in 2021. (Mel Melcon/Los Angeles Times/TNS)

Justice Department Sues Cubs For ADA Violations

By Jason Meisner, Robert Channick, Paul Sullivan, Reprinted from the Chicago Tribune/TNS | July 22, 2022

CHICAGO — The much-heralded renovation of Wrigley Field seemingly ensured its status as a jewel of the game for decades to come, but when it comes to complying with a federal law protecting access for fans with disabilities, the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago says the Cubs struck out.

Following a yearslong investigation, U.S. Attorney John Lausch's office filed a lawsuit last week alleging the team violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to make Wrigley "appropriately accessible" to fans who use wheelchairs or have other disabilities.

The 19-page suit filed in U.S. District Court comes nearly three years after it was revealed in a separate court action that federal authorities had launched an investigation into whether the Cubs' \$1 billion, five-year renovation of the century-old ballpark met the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



A \$1 billion renovation to Chicago's Wrigley Field — one of the most famous venues in baseball — failed to make the stadium "appropriately accessible" to people with disabilities, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. (Blake Guidry/Unsplash)

The lawsuit alleged that the extensive rebuild of the bleachers and lower grandstand, which was dubbed the "1060 Project," failed to provide wheelchair users with adequate sight lines, as compared with standing patrons. In the lower grandstand, the suit says, "a wheelchair user can barely see any of the infield when spectators stand up — often during the most exciting parts of the game."

In general admission areas, wheelchair seating is largely clustered in the last row of seating sections, according to the suit. The Cubs also failed to incorporate wheelchair seating into new premium clubs and group seating areas, such as the Catalina Club in the upper deck and the Budweiser Patio in right field, and the overall design failed to remove architectural barriers to access in unaltered portions of the ballpark, according to the suit.

The lawsuit names the Cubs and other corporate owners and operators of the Wrigley Field facility as defendants. The government is seeking a court injunction forcing the team to fix any deficiencies at the ballpark as well as unspecified compensatory damages "in an appropriate amount for injuries suffered."

Cubs spokesman Julian Green said in an emailed statement the team had been cooperating with the federal probe and was "disappointed" with the Justice Department's decision to sue.

"(We) hope the matter can be resolved amicably, but we will defend Wrigley Field and our position it meets accessibility requirements for fans," the statement read. "The renovation of Wrigley Field greatly increased accessibility of the ballpark and was completed in accordance with applicable law and historic preservation standards consistent with the ballpark's designation as a national and city of Chicago landmark."

In response to the federal inquiry, Green said, the Cubs have "made several offers to voluntarily further enhance accessible features of the ballpark, including seating, restrooms, concessions and other key accessibility elements."

Those claims were disputed, however, by Chicago attorney David A. Cerda, who filed a lawsuit in December 2017 on behalf of his son, David F. Cerda, a lifelong Cubs fan with muscular dystrophy who uses a wheelchair.

Cerda's lawsuit, which is ongoing in Chicago federal court, alleges the renovated Wrigley Field made it a much worse experience for patrons with disabilities to attend a game.

"We're very happy to see the Justice Department picked up on one of the central allegations that we made: that the Cubs out of sheer greed, replaced the good ADA seating that existed with luxury seating, which excluded ADA patrons in knowing violation of ADA rights," the elder Cerda said.

Before the renovation, Cerda and his son often sat in an accessible seating section about 15 rows behind home plate. Those seats were moved farther away from the field during the course of the renovation.

Other accessible seats in the right field bleachers and in the upper deck under the press box were converted to premium seats, Cerda said, relegating patrons with disabilities to less desirable vantage points.

“They did it for money, for greed, for profit,” said Cerda, 61.

Before the Cubs’ game against the New York Mets last week, longtime fan Victor Pazik, who was there with his 32-year-old son, Andrew, who uses a wheelchair, said he’s been to Wrigley many times both before and after the renovation and never noticed an issue with accessibility.

“I have always felt there was adequate seating, access up and down the elevators, ramps,” said Pazik, 60, of Hobart, Ind. “It’s really never been a problem. But that’s just my experience.”

The lawsuit by the Justice Department, includes photos of some of the worst alleged violations of federal law, singling out the overhaul of the bleachers as being particularly bad for wheelchair users.

“The Cubs’ decision to cluster wheelchair seats on the porches not only isolates wheelchair users from other fans and confines them to the worst seats in the bleachers, it also inhibits their ability to watch the game,” the suit stated. “This is because the wheelchair seats on the porches were not constructed to provide lines of sight to the field over standing spectators.”

Instead, the suit stated, the wheelchair seats rely on a policy that “discourages but does not preclude bleacher fans from sitting and standing in the two rows immediately in front of the wheelchair spaces.” Though the rows are roped off and ushers are supposed to enforce the rules, spectators still wander in front of the seats, according to the suit.

The “Batter’s Eye” area in dead centerfield, which is covered with a mesh tarp and gets abnormally hot in the summer, has also been the subject of numerous complaints from wheelchair users, the suit alleged.

The Cubs first filed notice of the federal review in December 2019 as part of the Cerda lawsuit. At the time, a lawyer representing the team wrote a letter to the judge saying the Cubs believed the overhaul had “significantly increased the accessibility of the ballpark.”

The letter said compliance with the ADA “is of critical importance to the Cubs, as is ensuring the accessibility to all fans to Wrigley Field, a historic and aging ballpark with a limited physical footprint.”

In the statement released after the lawsuit was filed, the team said Wrigley Field “is now more accessible than ever in its 108-year history,” with 11 more elevators than before, more accessible restrooms, assistive listening technology for fans with hearing impairments, enhanced sound systems and “upgraded ticketing and online systems for purchase of seating, including accessible seating.”

Cerda said the 11 elevators added to the renovated Wrigley Field are needed to shuttle patrons with disabilities far from the good seats they once enjoyed.

“They’ve got more elevators because they need more elevators to shove disabled patrons to the upper reaches of the bleachers,” he said.

Cerda’s son, who went to his first Cubs game when he was 3 months old, is now 25 and continues to follow the team. Last week, he attended his first game at Wrigley Field since the pandemic hit, watching the Cubs notch a fifth consecutive loss, falling 4-2 to the Baltimore Orioles.

A native South Sider who grew up rooting for the Cubs, the elder Cerda began attending games at Wrigley Field when he was 8 years old and suffered through a lifetime of losing, including the team’s epic collapse in 1969, which he witnessed from fifth-row seats behind the first-base dugout.

He never wavered in his loyalty, until joining the battle over accessible seating.

From Norman's Desk

July 26th marked the 32nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thirty two years of equal access under the law for people with disabilities.

The ADA ensures that individuals with disabilities have the right to participate in the world around them. The ADA provides clear and comprehensive national standards to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Consequently, individuals with disabilities have the right to live in their homes and have equal access to education, jobs, recreation, shopping and entertainment. It has reshaped our nation in ways that people with disabilities and people without disabilities take for granted.



Project Freedom held a celebration that day, and here is my introduction to the ceremonies.

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Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining us to celebrate the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act 32 years ago, this very day.

It was also a very big day for Project Freedom as we were featured on NJ news that night reacting to the news that the long effort to get this civil rights into law was successful. It was an amazing piece of advocacy to get this law enacted against very stiff resistance.

Now just think about it. People who could not walk, who could not see, who could not hear, or could not talk worked together to get this law passed. They traveled on inaccessible trains and buses. They stayed at hotels without rooms designed for people in wheelchairs and without braille signage for people who were blind. They went to meetings in public buildings through back doors where the garbage came out and rode freight elevators that transported the same smelly refuse. Yet they still went to Washington to make their presence felt.

Even that wasn't enough. There was always some excuse not to pass it. Then one day the advocates had enough. One by one, they threw themselves out of their chairs to start climbing the steps of the Capitol on their stomachs one step at time. Young and old; disabled vets, people born with CP, spinal cord injuries from car accidents; they all climbed up those steps because they wanted their rights engraved in law. The video of this day is inspiring to watch.

This event shocked the Congress into action, and soon afterward a compromise version of the ADA passed both houses of Congress with few votes in dissent. But, still, it took a midnight candle vigil in front of the White House on a rainy night in May to get the first President Bush to sign it into law.

But the story is not over because the A.D.A. has been under attack since its passage. Every Congress since 1992 has had bills introduced to water our rights down. The US Supreme Court ruled on the conditionality of the law, but it also has whittled away on how it can be applied. The attack continues today.

This is why we celebrate and mark this day each year. We celebrate those who crawled up those steps and who went in those back doors that smelled of garbage. We mark the day as a point in time. We will not go back to pre-A.D.A. days. We will fight for our rights.

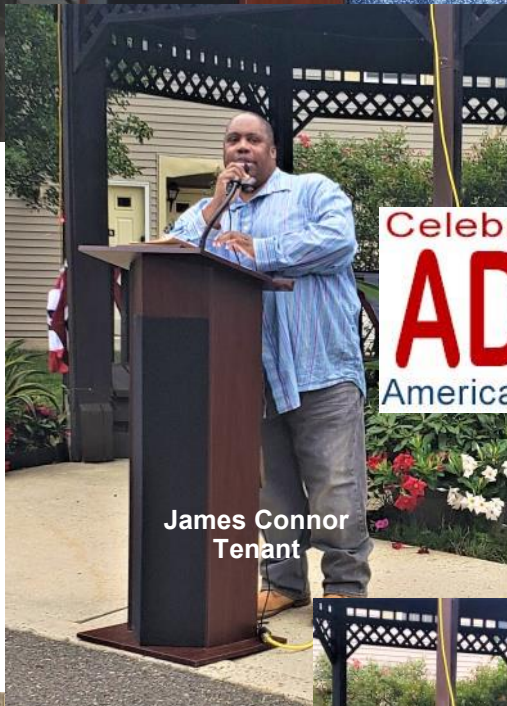
Norman A. Smith, Co-Founder & Associate Executive Director



Deborah Blakely
Robbinsville Twp
Council Woman



Kelly Borden
Project Freedom Board Member



James Connor
Tenant

Celebrate. Learn. Share.
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Americans with Disabilities Act



Scott Elliott
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Matt Payton
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Mindset Matters: Disability Pride And Revolutionizing The Function Of Employee Resource Groups

*Reprinted from Forbes / DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION by Jonathan Kaufman / Jul 22, 2022
Kaufman is A Consultant, Executive Coach and Licensed Psychotherapist*

Although July is coming to a close and Disability Pride Month is ending, the truth is this should not be seen as a conclusion, but rather an opening to rethink the disability narrative in its totality. Disability Pride is a celebration, but more importantly, it is a moment to remind people it is time to reconsider the relationship of persons with disabilities across the fabric of society. It is a month to reassert the power, beauty, and value of this community and recognize there is more to do, and the important role that persons with disabilities can play in creating a sustainable future.

The business ecosystem is certainly at the front lines of creating this future, however, as the world of work is continuing to evolve, organizations must be prepared for the coming challenges ahead. Employee Resource Groups (also known as ERGs, affinity groups, or business network groups) have become a valuable tool where factions of employees come together in their workplace based on shared characteristics or life experiences. ERGs provide support to enhance career development and contribute to personal growth within the work environment. Traditionally, ERGs have focused on personality traits or characteristics of underrepresented groups, from women, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender, etc. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the purpose of ERGs emphasizing special interests such as workplace wellness, and community advocacy among other activities. It is this shift that organizations must begin to embrace by recognizing the value of an ERG as a central instrument for business growth in the 21st Century economy. ERGs are as much about building dialogue across the enterprise from the C-Suite to the rank-and-file employee.

For persons with disabilities, ERGs serve another purpose. It is an outlet to help shape organizational culture and build more effective communication within the business. Corporate leaders must see this as an opportunity to embrace the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organization by being cognizant of what the key takeaways are through this time of radical change. It is the ERG that offers C-level executives and senior leaders to both see the magnificence of Disability Pride on full display while recognizing the value it plays as a tool for business growth. The ERG provides a conduit for persons with disabilities to dialogue about everything from internal needs, human capital issues, and workplace design, to external issues and the development of products and services. Leaders must elevate its prominence to illustrate its growing influence and the residual impact across the business ecosystem.

While the future vision of the Disability ERG is both a place of understanding and learning, the significance to business culture is the true benefit for the long term. As organizations continue to explore the ever-growing prominence of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Disability ERG provides a laboratory to explore an additional ingredient, the role of Accessibility, which should be central to the nomenclature of business in the 21st century. Accessibility is no longer an issue of compliance, but critical to every facet of business design and intimately connected to diversity, equity, and inclusion. DEIA should be an acronym every business needs to know, and it can be the Disability ERG that becomes the catalyst.



Building a community to embrace diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility to shape a more ... [+] GETTY

Moving forward, businesses need to acknowledge that Disability Pride is a cultural touchstone that has tremendous value for a community but is imperative for business culture in helping to redefine the rule of business engagement and see the prospects for the innovation to come.

PBS Documentary Explores Shortcomings Of Disability Support System

Reprinted from July 26, 22 DisAbility Scoop by Shaun Heasley



Christine Hanberg with her brother Peter in the documentary "He's My Brother," which airs next month on PBS. (Katinka Hustad)

What happens when a family is left to care for an adult who is deaf, blind and has autism without support? That's the focus of a new documentary that's set to premiere on national television.

The 60-minute film "He's My Brother" follows co-director Christine Hanberg and her family as they look at what their future holds with her brother Peter, 31, who has multiple disabilities.

Until five years ago, Peter attended a day center, but when it closed, his care fell completely on his family. Peter's mother quit her job to care for him full time while his father works and Christine helps as much as she can.

"Weeks and months went on, so I grabbed the camera and started filming because I could not comprehend how much responsibility we as relatives have to take when the system fails," Christine Hanberg said. "Now, seven years have gone by and we still haven't gotten any help at all. Not even one offer for day care for Peter and I see so many people struggling with the broken system."

Christine Hanberg notes that Denmark, where her family lives, has one of the richest welfare states in the world, but still fails to help people like Peter.

The documentary shows how Peter experiences life through touch, smell and taste and explores Christine's worries about becoming her brother's primary caregiver when her parents are gone.

"It happens all over the world," she said. "I hope that our film can start a discussion about basic human rights for people with disabilities and about how big a responsibility we as relatives should take. For my part, I will be there for my brother anytime. But what about those who do not have the opportunity or the time in their lives? If the system doesn't help. Who will, then?"

"He's My Brother" will have its national broadcast premiere Aug. 1 on POV on PBS and will stream for free at [pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org) and on the PBS Video app until Sept. 1.

Despite Cerebral Palsy, Race Car Driver Only Knows One Speed Page 8

by Lori Riley, Hartford Courant/TNS | July 14, 2022

STAFFORD, Conn. — He grew up at the track, surrounded by a racing family, so it's no surprise that Bryan Narducci became a race car driver.

But the fact that he was almost born at the track, and the circumstances of his birth, 21 years ago, is where Narducci's story shifts from that of the typical driver you'd find at Stafford Speedway on a Friday night.

Narducci was born three months premature. He weighed 3 pounds, 13 ounces. In infancy, he stopped breathing at least three times — twice at the hospital in New Jersey where he spent the first five weeks of his life, and once again at home, and at age 15 months, he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

He wore braces on his legs as a child and had corrective surgery when he was 8 years old. He started racing Go-Karts at Stafford the next summer.

Now 21, Narducci, of Colchester, is one of the top drivers in the SK Modified standings at Stafford Speedway.

He couldn't sit up at six months and he would crawl commando-style, not using his legs. When he was 15 months he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

Narducci didn't walk until he was 4. He wore braces on his legs until he was 8.

None of that mattered to Bryan. He wanted to race. The family was always at the track. Both of his grandfathers raced as well as his dad and his uncles and his mom did a few times, too.

Narducci doesn't have mobility in his ankles so he can't flex them fully. Getting in and out of the car in an emergency would be an issue; also pushing down on the gas, brake and clutch pedals.

The former, his mother took care of. The latter, Narducci simply managed to adapt to.

"I wanted to (race) and my parents were both like 'Ehhhhh' but I was like, 'No, I want to do this.' They finally cracked and got me a car, a Go-Kart."

"I said you need to be able to get in and out of the Go-Kart by yourself quickly, God forbid something happens and you flip over," Pearl said. "He had to practice. I would set the timer. He had to do it in a certain amount of time. They're pretty safe but you never know."

"He had to go back for his checkup. We told the doctor he was racing, and he didn't know what to say. He said, 'Racing what?' We showed him and he said, 'He can get in and out of that?' 'Yep.' He was amazed. Because when Bryan was born, they said he would probably never walk. Going from the possibility of never being able to walk to getting in and out of a race car is just insane."

As far as pushing down on the pedals — Pearl said she doesn't know how he does it.

Said Narducci: "I've figured it out, how to make it work, moving more of my legs instead of rolling my ankles. Just kind of using my whole leg for the pedals. Other than that, I don't think it really bothers me, to be honest."

"I can get around. I walk with a little bit of a limp. I work for my friend's construction company and I was outside all day doing stuff, carrying 80-, 90-pound things. I definitely get sore at the end of the day. Other than that, it doesn't affect me too bad."

(On a recent) Friday night, Narducci got in a wreck with another driver, Ronnie Williams, early in the 40-lap feature race but he was OK. He's in his third — and most successful season — of racing Modifieds at Stafford. His crew chief, JJ Vece, helped him with that.

"The ability was there, he had the hands-on experience, he had the mentality, he just had to back himself down and harness his ability," Vece said. "He's getting along pretty well. He's taught himself to adapt pretty well."



Bryan Narducci, 21, climbs into his SK Modified race car before taking some warm-up laps at Stafford Motor Speedway. Narducci was born three months prematurely and has cerebral palsy. He comes from a long line of race car drivers, including his dad, Ron, who watches at left. (Cloe Poisson/Hartford Courant/TNS)