

Daily Herald

Event Sunday to benefit Handi-Ramp Foundation

By Lee Litas | Daily Herald Columnist
Published: 9/4/2007 7:31 AM

Imagine in an instant you are involved in an accident. You awake to find that you either have no use of your legs and limited use of her arms, or no use of your legs but full use of your arms and upper body. Now imagine your accommodations are not designed for your needs.

For the 1.8 million Americans over the age of 6 who use a wheelchair, this is their reality.

Thom Disch, director of Handi-Ramp in Libertyville, has been helping more than 100,000 disabled individuals since 1958, and knows these concerns all too well.

"What happens is that people become virtual prisoners in their own homes," he said. "They may have done everything right to protect

themselves insurance-wise and then when the unfortunate occurs and they find themselves in a wheelchair or in a scooter, the insurance company doesn't provide for any sort of access in or out of their homes."

In other words, while Medicare and Medicaid do provide the equipment to make people mobile with wheelchairs and scooters, they stop short at accessibility devices such as ramps or lifts, or the home modifications necessary to make this equipment fully usable.

"The result is a growing population of disabled individuals who are unable to leave their homes, or even get around within them, without help from others. Simple everyday activities such as shopping, going to the library, to church, to lunch, or visiting neighbors become nearly impossible," said Disch.

Illinois Sen. Susan Garrett, who is chair of the Senate Public Health Committee and vice-chair of the State Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, works closely with the disabled community and has introduced numerous legislation in assistance.

"It's very peculiar how difficult it has been to bridge this insurance gap," Garrett said. "I think it's because many state legislatures don't consider the variety of hurdles presented to individuals with disabilities. It's always a struggle with money and Handi-Ramp's initiative to create a foundation which will raise money to assist individuals facing these hurdles and obstacles ensuring that they get the assistance they need is certainly a priority."

In fact, Handi-Ramp and Thom Disch have created two initiatives to help address this issue. The Home Access Program is a free consulting service that works with real estate agents to help families that have a member with a disability select the right home for their needs. Handi-Ramp can then provide the right modifications prior to the purchase so that these modifications can be included in the mortgage.

Separately, the Handi-Ramp Foundation was formed in 2006 in an effort to help individuals meet their needs by providing funding for those who cannot afford to modify their homes.

The ramp issue, says Garrett, "is of special importance because many people who have a need for a ramp cannot afford one. And the Handi-Ramps are absolutely

essential to ensure that people can get from one place to another. I have been supportive overall of these types of projects and I will continue to make sure that they continue to receive the type of prominence they deserve."



The Handi-Ramp Foundation will be sponsoring a charity event from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday at Arlington Park in Arlington Heights. The event is \$75 per person and will include a chef's table buffet, open bar and a silent auction. Proceeds will go toward creation of Handi-Ramps for individuals in need, free of charge.

For more information, visit www.handirampfoundation.org or www.handiramp.com.

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