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Handi-Ramp helps disabled get access to buildings -- and horses

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July 8, 2010

By **JOHN ROSZKOWSKI** jroszkowski@pioneerlocal.com

Thom Disch of Lake Bluff makes handicapped accessible ramps for a living, but he also tries to lend a hand to those in need whenever he can.

So, when Disch was recently contacted by NBC's Today Show about building and donating a customized ramp for a Montana-based organization that provides recreational therapy for the disabled, he was happy to help.

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"Whenever you're able to give back to the community, it's always very exciting," said Thom Disch, who runs Handi-Ramp. (Dan Luedert/Staff Photographer)

Disch is owner and CEO of Handi-Ramp in Libertyville, one of the nation's oldest designers and manufacturers of accessibility products such as ramps and lifts. As part of a Today Show feature program called "Lend A Hand," his company donated a customized ramp worth about \$5,000 to an organization called Eagle Mount in Bozeman, Mont., which will allow wheelchair-bound residents and other disabled individuals to safely mount and dismount horses.

Handi-Ramp's donated ramp was mentioned on a Today Show

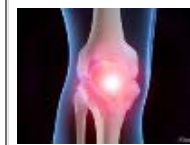
program with Al Roker about the Eagle Mount organization, which aired on June 22.

"It was wonderful to have our products mentioned on the Today Show. Whenever you're able to give back to the community, it's always very exciting," Disch said.

"We were able to provide something that not only met their needs, but there are other organizations that do riding therapy that may also have the need for horse-mounting ramps," he said.

Since the Today Show program aired, Disch said his company has received a call from an organization that serves disabled veterans, which is looking to raise money to acquire a handicapped accessible ramp for a community center that serves veterans.

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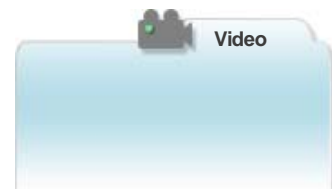
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Disch purchased the business from the former owners in 1995, which at the time, he said Handi-Ramp has steadily grown and moved into a larger building on North Avenue in Libertyville in 2001.

The company now produces a wide range of customized ramps, both for individuals and for businesses. He said the company has a contract with the Veterans Administration and makes handicapped-accessible ramps for homes for injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The company also makes ramps for loading or trucking companies that are looking for safer and more efficient ways to load and unload products.

The company also produces non-skid aluminum treads that are used for stairs. About three years ago, Handi-Ramp purchased another company called PetSTEP, which makes pet ramps sold at retail stores used by pet owners to get pets in and out vehicles.

Disch said in addition to the donation of the ramp to the Montana organization, he has also established a non-profit foundation two years ago called the Handi-Ramp Foundation, which raises money for disabled individuals who need ramps for their homes but can't afford them. While insurance helps cover the cost for individuals to buy wheelchairs, scooters, and other accessibility features, he said it does not pay for ramps or lifts to help people get in and out of their homes.

"We've set up a foundation for taking donations and providing ramps for people that can't afford them," he said.

Disch said he views the foundation and the donation of the equestrian ramp as ways of trying to help others and being a good corporate citizen.

"Any entrepreneur knows that his business is his passion," he said. "It's great to build a business and make an income and at the same time do things to give back to the community. It's very rewarding."

For more information about Handi-Ramp, persons can visit www.handiramp.com or can call (800) 876-7267.

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