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Annual Employment Edition

LivAbility Edition 10 | Fall 2017
INDEPENDENT & ACTIVE IN ARIZONA

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For nearly 20 years, I’ve been going to the annual conference of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) in Washington, D.C. The conference is always a great reenergizer. It reminds me of why Ability360 exists and why we are so important. It’s also a great opportunity for us to orient some of our newer Ability360 staff to independent living philosophy and the disability rights movement. There is nothing more powerful than being hunkered down in the Grand Hyatt for five days with a thousand people with all types of disabilities. Hearing their stories! Learning and sharing experiences! Strategizing political action! Its grass roots action and organizing at its best. You can feel the energy and emotion running high throughout.

All NCIL conferences are great, but this year’s July conference was extraordinary in so many ways. First, the disability community is in the midst of a heated battle to defend the Americans with Disability Act from notification provisions, which would weaken it as we saw in Arizona. Second, the Senate healthcare vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, occurred the week of the conference. Not since the passage of the ADA itself has NCIL and other disability rights groups, such as ADAPT, had such an opportunity to engage in direct action with so much at stake. The Republican “repeal and replace” agenda included massive cuts to Medicaid that surely would be devastating to the disability community. I truly believe the advocacy by NCIL, ADAPT and others made a huge difference in the final outcome on this issue.

So if you’re wondering what happened in D.C. that week, here’s some of it. As usual, the conference attendees marched from the Grand Hyatt to the Capitol lawn where they gathered for a boisterous healthcare rally that nearly echoed to the halls of Congress. Unlike recent years, there was tremendous participation by congressional leadership, mostly from Democrats of course. Senators Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, former Senator Tom Harkin, former Secretary of Labor and current DNC chair Tom Perez and nearly a dozen other members of Congress came and fired up the large, loud and enthusiastic crowd. They really set the stage for what was next to come.

Typically after the rally, advocates head to congress for their scheduled Hill visits. This year however, about 400 of us marched to the Hart Senate Building for a healthcare demonstration and a bit of civil disobedience. We wanted to send a message to all Senators that cuts to Medicaid were immoral and wrong for America. And boy did we! Chants of, “free our people” “no caps or cuts to Medicaid” and “our homes, not nursing homes” echoed throughout the buildings atrium as Senate staffers looked on with their cell phones recording the demonstration from the second to seventh floors. It was truly a powerful, historic and moving moment for the disability rights movement! After what seemed like 20 minutes of boisterous chanting, the police arrived en mass with bullhorns and began warning us to disband or we’d be arrested. In the end, about 65 demonstrators were arrested. The rest of us went on our way to conduct our remaining congressional visits.

Just a little more than two days later, 48 Democrats and three Republicans, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and John McCain of Arizona voted against the scaled-down Republican plan to repeal parts of the Affordable Care Act. When McCain voiced his no vote with his dramatic and memorable thumbs down sign, I was so proud to be an Arizonan. I will always believe in my heart that our advocacy had something to do with it! Now with the threat of new repeal and replace bills, our advocacy must rise again and demand a bipartisan solution that works for all Americans.

Phil Pangrazio
President & CEO, Ability360

Photo courtesy of NCIL
Employment.

It’s what gets this magazine published. It’s what keeps all of us here (rather late at times): our passions, our drives, our careers. And this edition is full of stories that celebrate these qualities.

Too often people think that the one and only way to become employed is by submitting a résumé, enduring an interview and then waiting and praying for a phone call. For those of us with disabilities, the process is only made worse by the often-perceived uncertainty that an employer will not see past our disability to see our ability.

In the case of all of us in the marketing department, the road to employment was different. It started with a willingness and interest in volunteering at Ability360. The experience and the interaction lead to being in the right place at the right time. When the opportunity for a paid position arose, management looked at those of us with a proven performance and offered us our positions. Thus a marketing department came to be – one volunteer-turned-paid-professional at a time.

In this edition of LivAbility we recognize October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. We encourage you to think about where your passions lie and consider seeking out opportunities that match.

Volunteering does not have to be a one way street. There is nothing wrong with donating your time and skill towards a good cause that ideally someday could turn into a career.

Ability360 kicked off a new program in September, the Community Leadership Academy (page 60), which trains adults with disabilities to lead. First, in volunteer appointments on boards and commissions, then potentially leading in elected or appointed policy positions – yet another employment path.

Creative pathways to employment are out there. Ability360 alum, Tony Jackson (page 45) found his new path through entrepreneurialism, creating his own company with capital raised through GoFundMe.

Three of our profiles, Casey Johansen (page 34) and Tiger Desmarais (page 40) and Vasant Garcia (page 43) continued on their established career paths after acquiring their disabilities.

Lisa Purdy (page 38) is Ability360’s Lead Employment Coordinator for the Ticket to Work program. Give her a call if you’re ready to explore your return to work. Visit our website, Ability360.org/Employment for more information.

Speaking of employment, November is National Family Caregivers’ month. Many of us could not maintain our own employment without the help of our caregivers and for them we give thanks. Ability360 offers one of the best caregiving agencies in Arizona and if you’re looking to work, this may be your ticket to a fulfilling career (see back cover).

We’re proud of our work to bring you this edition and we hope you enjoy it.
THE POWER OF YOU.

We’re here to help you make a difference.
Call or click: 602.381.1400 or www.azfoundation.org
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Casey Johansen, co-owner of BCS Enterprises.

Photo by Jerry O'Connor
"His third cover!"

Look for this icon! It indicates additional video content online.
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Born and raised in Philadelphia. Alison came to Phoenix in 2016. After graduating with a degree in Therapeutic Recreation from Temple University, Alison pursued her career as a recreational therapist at Ability360. With a love for leisure and recreation, Alison enjoys hiking, painting, drawing and making people smile any chance she can.

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Angeline Carbajal is the Program Coordinator of Communications at the University of Arizona Disability Resource Center. She started as a student worker for the DRC her freshman year and graduated from the UA in May 2015 with her bachelor’s in journalism. She hopes to pursue a graduate degree in marketing starting August 2017.

EMILY LOPEX
Emily Lopex has a reputation for being overly assertive and an almost irrational love of the chocolate-frosted donut. Her legislative advocacy journey started at 15, under the guidance of teachers who wanted to curb her enthusiasm for debate (read: arguing openly in class) into something more productive. Currently, Emily is an active participant in the disability community as the Advocacy Support Specialist for Ability360.

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This magazine is printed with vegetable-based inks.
It's Saturday morning and Haley, my 15-year-old daughter, comes to my room. We talk softly as she gives me my morning meds and empties my catheter bag. She brushes my hair and applies my makeup. As she dresses me we discuss school and her boyfriend. My brother, Efrim joins us and transfers me to my powerchair.

Haley is my only child and I am her only parent. She was 13 when I became paralyzed from the shoulders down as a passenger in a rollover car-accident. Before then, she travelled around the West Coast with me while completing school online.

The accident flipped our lives upside-down just like it flipped the vehicle. After three intense months of hospitalization and rehab, my brother, daughter and I moved back to our small hometown. As a quadriplegic, the lack of independence drove me insane. Efrim, a bachelor and a writer who had been living in New Orleans at the time of my accident, abruptly had a huge responsibility – caring for me, cooking and cleaning, and trying to still find the time to research and write. Suddenly he’s cooking for three instead of one.

And then there was Haley, fourteen and in eighth grade. I tried to allow her to do whatever she asked for: football games, hanging out with friends, nights with her cousin. Her best friend would help with my physical therapy alongside my daughter. Haley was stressed and depressed, and I wasn’t sure if our predicament brought it on.

I worried that she had one foot out the door.

She and my brother used to be close but now she wasn’t used to someone other than me telling her what to do. My brother makes it possible for my daughter and I to have our life together although it isn’t always easy.

Life has gotten better. Sure, my fifteen-year-old spoon-feeds me and tucks me in bed. I couldn’t imagine a more reversed role. But what Haley does most for me is give me the desire to live life to the fullest no matter what.

Now that I am not working, I cherish hearing every detail about her life while my former, able-bodied self rarely had the time. Haley brightens my world with her silliness, her sweetness, her seriousness. She has long been my friend and my daughter. We talk about the future from time to time. I want her to have a family and/or career, want all her hopes to come true. I just want to be close by, experiencing it with her when I can, as she once experienced my life with me.

Haley and I argue over school and grades and attitudes just like any other mother and daughter. I know she could just run out on me if she wanted, and there are many times when I am in tears and it is she that wipes my face and calms me.

I have met many beautiful quadriplegic moms online since my injury two years ago. We don’t need working arms and legs to be the one person our kids count on the most. They may see us in agony, but they see us as strong, too. They know we took on a hard life and lived it, still found joy, and always loved and encouraged them.

Tell us your story: Editor@Ability360.org
Promoting independent living within our communities
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REGISTER FOR SPRING!
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Phoenix-based wheelchair van conversion manufacturer, VMI, is a long-time friend of the disability community. Our newest contributor, Scott Daravanis spoke with Doug Eaton, VMI’s Founder and President, about the values and vision that have shaped the organization and kept VMI in the forefront of conversion vans for more than 25 years. Doug (above) embodies VMI’s core values of “One team. One journey.” This plays out when he walks the assembly line chatting with team members or cheering at any one of the community-based events VMI sponsors.

Modified SUV Expands WAV Market

Vantage Mobility International (VMI) is adapting to a changing marketplace, leading the way in expanding the options for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) and in formulating how to meld self-driving technology into reality.

Fifteen years ago, America’s auto manufacturers drove nearly two million minivans off their assembly lines annually. Today, on average, manufacturers build around four million Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) and 500,000 minivans per year.

“Consumers are voting with their wallet and they’re preferring SUVs.”

VMI President and CEO, Doug Eaton, continued “The minivan provides the perfect platform to make our conversion. Though they prefer the SUV, they’re not going to compromise their needs for style, so we said, ‘If we’re going to do an SUV, it better have the same features as a minivan.’ The best-case scenario is to provide the need and the want.”

They found it with the Honda Pilot, which has the same chassis structure as the Odyssey van. Still, VMI had to come up with some innovative adjustments to make the Pilot accessible.

“Normally a hinged door opens at 60 degrees. We found how we can open it really wide so we can get a 32-inch wide ramp in it,” Eaton said.

“I have no problem getting into a minivan, spinning around 360 degrees with my wheelchair and getting up to the driver or passenger position,” Technical Support Expert and Trainer Tiger Desmarais adds. “I was afraid we wouldn’t be able to achieve that in the Pilot because of the size but (Honda’s designers) did a lot of slick
modifications and I can do the same thing in the Pilot as I can do in the minivan.

"Your soccer mom has moved from a minivan to an SUV. That’s the market we want to be able to appeal to, and I think the Pilot does that well."

Eaton said Honda has been very supportive of VMI’s plans and alterations. The first VMI-modified Honda Pilot should roll off the assembly line before the end of 2017.

"SUVs are so popular and the Honda Pilot is very stylish. We’ve done the research and we’re convinced it is going to be a really big seller for us," Eaton said.

"It’s going to be great asset for us. It will catch a market that just doesn’t want a mini-van," Technical Support Expert Howard Martin added. "The veterans that just came back from war; they don’t want a mini-van. They want a cooler vehicle and the Honda Pilot will be that niche for them."

Eaton has a delicious analogy to express his excitement. "I joke we’ve been building chicken sandwiches for 25 years and chicken sandwiches are incredibly popular, but everybody wants a cheeseburger, so now that we’re in the SUV business, we get to build our own cheeseburger!"

The Future of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

"The economic future is very bright because Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles is a growing market and there are investments pouring into this market," VMI President and CEO Doug Eaton said. "What keeps me awake at night is we have to work together with the manufacturers to solve complex problems. The main problem to solve is how to make our vehicles more affordable. We simply are going to price ourselves out of the market at this pace. The vehicles are more expensive and we’re making our conversions bigger and stronger and faster, which means they’re more expensive, so creating more affordable products is mission critical.

"(In addition) Our industry has to get together with the technology giants like Google and Apple and the auto makers like Toyota and Honda and Chrysler and GM and figure out how we’re going to integrate self-driving technology with wheelchair accessible vehicles. We have so many quadriplegics that simply cannot drive because they can’t use their arms or legs. We need to give them the same independence that everyone else has.

"If we don’t embrace that technology, then we’re going to miss a huge opportunity."

VMI fulfills its customer-focused objective through researching and promoting new designs and developing technologies

"The greatest companies focus on the customer experience; that is what VMI is all about. We’re the leader in this industry because we focus on the customer and the customer experience more than any other company in the industry," Eaton said. "We know who we are and what we stand for, and that’s our customers. We believe we’re called to serve others. Our purpose is to never forget the challenges our customers face. We do this for more than just a paycheck."
State Senator John Kavanagh (R-LD23) created law that cracks down on those who park in access aisles.

When Common Courtesy Needs Enforcement
When you only enter your car from one side due to a ramp, lift or other assistive device, you have to rely on the common courtesy of strangers to not box you into your parking space by parking in the access aisle. You will find that “common courtesy” is not always so common.

A tow truck takes forever and hunting for the offender is sometimes impractical, given that you have places to be. You have a plane to catch, a child at school, a bed to welcome you home. You simply do not have the time to spend on some person who parked in the access aisle.

For many years, this brand of carelessness was not illegal in Arizona. While it had been illegal for anyone without valid placards to use accessible parking, it was not illegal for anyone—cars, motorcycles, and shopping carts alike—to park in the access aisle in most Arizona cities.

“"It was a ridiculous mistake in crafting the original law," said State Senator John Kavanagh, who introduced SB 1239 earlier this year.

With its passing in March and recent enactment, Kavanagh hoped to close the unintended loophole in the original legislation by prohibiting anyone—with or without a placard—from parking in these designated, yellow crosshatched spaces.

However, a passed law is not necessarily an enforced law. Walter Olsen, a retired Phoenix Police detective of thirty years and major influencer of SB 1239, said that while the law is necessary, it probably won’t be enforced. Given that parking violations are a low priority and violators are often gone before an officer can respond to a complaint, it is unlikely a majority of violators will be caught and fined. Who enforces the law, the fine, and whether or not citizen reporting methods are available vary city-to-city, making enforcement throughout Arizona inconsistent.

In order for the law to be more effective, Olsen believes the public must be educated on accessibility, creating an environment of voluntary compliance with effective laws that discourage noncompliant activities. These laws must be enforced by police officers, who understand and are willing to enforce them and courts that hold people accountable.

“The disability community is an important community [that is] underserved significantly by the police,” Olsen said.

Many cities do not have programs that specifically target accessible parking violations, let alone spend a tremendous amount of resources on addressing them. Even cities like Phoenix with such programs have had dwindling interest in their volunteer-based programs. Accessibility Compliance Enforcement (ACE), a volunteer program that tickets accessible parking violations, has reduced in number since its creation. Save Our Space, a hotline that allows any citizen to report an accessible parking violation and mails educational literature to the registered owner of the vehicle, has received fewer calls than it has in previous years.

With the addition of SB 1239 in many Arizona cities, now is an opportune time to contact your city to see how they plan on implementing this new state law, to volunteer your services, and to find new ways to educate the public about accessibility.

Ever wonder where laws begin?

They often start with people like Gina Schuh, who turned a problem into a solution. On a police ride-along with then-Detective Walter Olsen, Schuh was pleased to see enforcement of accessibility laws, but shared her frustrations about people parking in access aisles, a problem she encounters often. Schuh turned those frustrations into political action by helping to pass a City of Gilbert parking ordinance and then bringing her voice to bear on SB 1239. Senator Kavanagh credits Olsen with bringing the issue of SB 1239 to his attention. Olsen credits Schuh, the founder of Accessible Arizona and blogger at Gina on a Roll. As Olsen said, “[Schuh] has and will continue to make a difference.”

Enterprise Holdings, which operates the Enterprise Rent-A-Car, National Car Rental and Alamo Rent A Car brands, provides a variety of mobility equipment to individuals with disabilities, including hand controls, spinner knobs, left foot accelerators and pedal extenders.

Mike Rollins, Vice President of Airports for Enterprise in Phoenix, has been in the car rental industry for about 35 years and with Enterprise for the past 10 years. He started as a part-time employee in college.

In 2006, Rollins’ son sustained an incomplete C-level spinal injury. He doesn’t need to use hand controls, however the injury impacted Rollins.

“For me, working with Ability360 is more of a personal passion,” Rollins said. “That’s why I’ll spend my time, money and effort in areas to help places like Ability360 and some of the organizations that are involved in helping individuals with disabilities, physically or whatever it may be. I think it opens up your heart to a little more compassion when it hits you close to home.”

“We probably prepare somewhere in the neighborhood of 35-40 reservations per month for people that have requested hand controls in Arizona,” Rollins said. “Although that number may vary a bit seasonally.”

Rollins said on average it takes about 90 minutes to put a hand control unit on a car and about 45 minutes to remove it.

“We need to make sure we have a certified technician putting the hand control unit on and that it’s installed and inspected correctly before we hand the keys over to the customer,” he said.

As of today, Enterprise has several different car models in Phoenix compatible with hand controls. Rollins said that the list is getting shorter though because many newer car models are manufactured with airbags below the steering wheel, preventing the safe installation of hand controls.

“The ADA is important to us, and we know we have a duty to make reasonable accommodations for our customers with disabilities,” Rollins said. “But at the end of the day, they’re our customers and we want to do what’s right; so disabled or not we try to take care of our customers in the best way that we can. We think we do a good job with out customer service.”
Renee Tyree travels frequently as a regional director of pharmacy based out of Mesa, AZ. She has used rental vehicles with hand controls since the 1990s. She highlighted some of the most important things to know when renting a car with hand controls.

► Know what type of hand-control unit is being installed and make sure it fits your needs. Some of the units include push/right angle, push/pull, push/twist, and push/rock.

► Know the type of car the hand control unit is being installed in. Car models vary between two-door and four-door. Some individuals are only able to use one or the other.

► Know the safety precautions involved in driving a vehicle with hand controls. Some car rental companies may disable the driver knee bolster airbag to install units. Always discuss safety issues with hand control installers, as there may be ways to prevent certain safety issues.
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Questions:
Renaldo Fowler, Arizona Center for Disability Law (602) 274-6287
David Carey, Ability360 (602) 443-0723.
Paratransit
5 Things to Know about Valley Metro’s New Program

1. The changes to Valley Metro Paratransit that took place on July 1, 2017 only impact customers traveling in the East Valley, in the Northwest Valley or those taking regional trips. Phoenix, Glendale and Peoria Dial-a-Ride services have not changed.

2. Although the start-up was bad, service is improving. Since July 1, on-time performance has improved and service complaints are declining. However, Valley Metro and Transdev are still working to improve service. Transdev has hired additional call center staff, opened a satellite facility in the Northwest Valley and they are making software changes and bringing on additional vehicles and drivers to make service better.

3. Valley Metro operates a shared-ride public paratransit system. This means that you should expect to share your ride with customers traveling in the same direction as you are traveling. If you have a specific appointment time, tell the agent who books your trip; this will help us run on-time.

4. Valley Metro Paratransit fares must be paid in cash or tickets. In the past, some drivers accepted credit cards, but this was never the agency approved policy. We will be exploring credit and debit card payment options in the future, but for now, all fares must be paid in cash or with pre-purchased Dial-a-Ride tickets. Phoenix residents may also show their valid Phoenix Dial-a-Ride Monthly Pass.

5. You should report very good or very poor service by contacting Valley Metro Customer Service at 602-253-5000, by email at csr@valleymetro.org or online at ValleyMetro.org.

For more information visit ValleyMetro.org or call 602-716-2100
For years now, my work has had me up in the air.

Which is a very corny way of telling you that I’ve spent a great deal of time contemplating life and the cosmos on airplanes. My work has taken me all around the U.S. and, to a degree, the world. Having long ago lost count of how many intimate experiences I’ve had with a Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) security agent, making sure that neither my body or my wheelchair are threats, these countless sojourns via air travel mean I get to share some of the fine points with you.

First, lots of people are going to try to help you. It’s a generous world out there, which is a lovely thing. But as you well know, well-meaning helpers are as likely to get in your way as actually be of valued assistance. Or worse. When the TSA officer starts their inevitable move to push me without asking, I let them know I push myself, thank you. At the door of the plane, the assist staffer — after having done the same thing as the TSA guy — will pull the aisle chair alongside me, after I specifically parked myself where I want to be in relation to it. I gently let him or her know that I’d like it back where it was please.

You might need help transferring into the seat, in which case you need to be very clear about how that should happen and be able to briefly instruct them on how to lift you.

Being a frequent traveler is an exercise in training people and doing it in a way that strikes that delicate balance of respect and confident assertion. So rule number one: you have the right to have things done in the way that is best and safe for you even under the time pressures of boarding an airplane that they have to get off the ground on time.

You should be respectful of their time. Arrive early, identify yourself to the gate agents so they can ensure the aisle chair is available, put the necessary “gate check only” tags on your chair, empty your bladder in plenty of time to board and have your bags ready to carry on. How smoothly things go is as much your responsibility as it is theirs.

Not really wanting to do an advertisement, I’ll tell you that I usually fly Southwest. Without assigned seating I can always get a seat in the front row with extra leg room — which also means that anyone sitting in the middle or window seat won’t have to climb over you to get to their seat or the restroom once you’re airborne. With the other airlines, book as early as you can and then call back specifically to block the “bulkhead” seat for that legroom. Or space for your service dog. Those seats are supposed to be for you, but the competition can be fierce.

Air travel is something you can master. Once you get the hang of it, things will usually go well (except for the occasional abused wheelchair) and whether your destination is for work, pleasure or both, it will be well worth the process. Travel well!
Even the best-planned trip can get bumpy. Know where the ADA ends and the ACAA begins. The ADA (found at ADA.gov) covers everything up to the plane door. The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) covers access and accommodation for passengers in the US for your actual flight. The requirements are different.

Read through the ACAA so you know what accommodations, facilities and services are (and are not) required and then carry a copy (found at transportation.gov/airconsumer/passengers-disabilities) with you in case you run into problems.

Every airport is required to have a Complaints Resolution Official on site to address access issues. Ask for that person if you have issues.

For more tips on travel, see our bonus content online.

Editor’s Note:
While bulkhead seats offer the most leg room for you or your service animal, some travelers prefer other rows. In the bulkhead, armrests are fixed making sliding transfers tricky. Some find window seats preferable so no one climbs over you to get out of their seat but window seats require that you’re able to move across the row.
For some wheelchair users, managing luggage while traveling solo is awkward. The Unstoppable gear bag by Phoenix Instinct was designed to address some of those challenges.

The bag, which retails for $373, features a quick-clip design to quickly hook to the back crossbar of a manual wheelchair. Omni-directional wheels allow the bag to nimbly move side-to-side as well as forward and backward. Extra handles positioned strategically along the top and sides allows for easier handling and straps attach the companion backpack to the gear bag for moving the pair as a single unit.

We asked Ernie Chun, member of Team USA wheelchair rugby team to check it out. Chun, an international traveler, uses a manual wheelchair and lives with a C6-7 incomplete spinal cord injury. He travels at least once a month for the team, sometimes for as long as two weeks at a time. He’s looking for sturdy bag he can check that will hold everything.

“It’s a great concept,” Chun said. “It is very well-made. I like the double stitching, the durable material and the re-enforcement straps on the sides. The separate pocket with top access is handy.”

The Unstoppable doesn’t work for everyone. Chun had to swap chairs in order for the quick-clip to work on his crossbar; additional adapter options would be helpful. Working the clip also takes some practice. If you drop the bag while attaching it to your chair, it’s difficult to pick-up when fully packed. Chun also noted that the wheels are unprotected and voiced concerns that they were at risk for damage during routine baggage handling, but offered a solution:

“If the bag were a bit wider and came out over the wheels like many other bags do, then a travel shower chair could also fit. Most guys on the team throw a lightweight shower chair in their bag.”

The Unstoppable is the brainchild of Andrew Slorance, a wheelchair user who also designed the Carbon Black wheelchair. The London-based company’s mission is to create products that advance independence through great design. More information can be found on the Phoenix Instinct website: PhoenixInstinct.com.
The Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona (BIAAZ) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a better future for Arizonans living with brain injury. The BIAAZ serves as the primary resource in Arizona to support brain injury survivors and caregivers on their ongoing journeys of recovery and renewal through community connections, empowerment activities and resource facilitation.

The BIAAZ has a plethora of support resources to effectively address the diverse needs of each and every person with a brain injury. We are your leading resource to connect you to local providers, educators and supporters depending on what your specific needs are.

A Resource Database: Available on the BIAAZ website, survivors and caregivers can easily search through providers and services by location, type of service and the availability of Spanish-speaking staff. The website also provides basic information on brain injury, treatment professionals, coping strategies, a calendar of events and a video question-and-answer component entitled “Navigating the System: A Guide for People with Brain Injuries and Their Families.”

Support Groups and Community Events: The BIAAZ is a leading resource in this tight-knit and supportive community and acts as a connection point to find hundreds of services, support groups and information for those living with brain injury and those serving them.

Education-and-Support Conferences: The BIAAZ conducts these conferences for brain injury survivors and their families and caregivers. We are mindful about creating an environment free of distractions or stressors and pacing presentations and breaks appropriately. We have one-to-one support available at all hours during the conference.

Professional Educational Conferences: We conduct professional conferences, such as the annual Mysteries of Brain Injury. Our expertise in living with brain injury encourages a shift among professionals from a program-centered point of view (e.g., eligibility criteria, program limits) to a person-centered perspective.

Photo by Loren Worthington
From R-L: Geneve Thiesing, Faes J. Ibrahim, Brittany Sweeney, Malissa Mallett, Carrie Collins-Fadell, Jeanne Anderson, Brittany Harker, Cecile Sharp
Ability360 again hosted the Latino Disability Summit and Resource Fair. This was the second year for the event sponsored by Chicanos Por La Causa and AARP Arizona featuring more than 80 exhibitors, 11 workshops and a well-attended noon time panel ‘What it means to be a Latino with Disabilities.’

Panelist George García became paralyzed at the age of 12. Now the executive director of Southwest Institute for Families and Children, he summed up the panelists’ experience about people making assumptions about what people with disabilities can do.

“Everyone is an individual; we have good moods and bad moods. We’re just like everyone else. I’m not special. I’m not here to inspire you. I’m not here to make you think everything is good in the world and that people with disability have a higher purpose. We don’t. I am a good person and sometimes I’m not. Just treat me like a person; like everyone else.”

Chicanos Por La Causa, AARP and Ability360 created this partnership leveraging the individual expertise of the organizing agencies to create a culturally-relevant experience that teaches skills to advocate, access resources and reach maximum potential in the community. The event works to remove societal barriers that limit the life choices of PWD in the Latino community.

“The Latino community in the U.S. has not yet fully learned how to use the services and resources available to people with disability,” co-chair Rebeca Cavazos said. “The Latino community is still working to change an old mindset that disability is a punishment, a curse on a family, and we tend to keep our family members with disability hidden away. When I came to the U.S. five years after my own injury, it took me two years to come out of my house and learn about the resources available to allow me to be independent.”

Exhibitors included the American Heart Association which offered CPR demonstrations and also presented the “Movement and Nutrition for Heart Health” workshop. Participants learned about healthy snacks and participated in interactive physical activity.

“I learned new ways to think about movement and staying healthy,” Marcos Castillo said. Castillo was an attendee last year and served on this year’s planning committee.

People kept that movement going, singing and dancing throughout the day in the exhibition hall as Gustavo Angeles played covers from the Beatles, Carlos Santana, Los...
Lobos among others. Mariachi Los Caballeros performed at day’s end.

PBS sponsored the Accessible Kids Zone with sensory games where therapy dogs Darla and Mollie waited for pets and snuggles. Children played board games and sported their temporary tattoos.

Maricopa County Recorder Adrian Fontes visited with attendees and exhibitors while demonstrating the county’s new accessible voting equipment. “I had a great time getting to know Maricopa County voters with disabilities and demonstrating our accessible voting machines,” Fontes said. “Getting to know voters and community advocates is what makes my job so rewarding.” The Recorder’s office registered several new voters at the event.

The offices of Senator John McCain, Congressman Ruben Gallego and Phoenix Councilwoman Laura Pastor were also represented.

Some attendees, like first-time attendee Hilda Valverde found much more than they expected at the summit.

“Initially I was only looking for information about caregiver resources for my mom; she is having problems with a bulging disc and she is in a lot of pain. My dad is currently taking care of her and it is becoming increasingly difficult for him,” Valverde said. “Not only did I get the information I needed but the event opened up my eyes to all the help that is available for our community. We were able to have my mom’s memory screened, get information about caregiver support groups for my dad and even my 16-year-old daughter is now interested in becoming a volunteer because of the people that she met.”

“All people with disabilities benefit from learning that they can have goals, get an education, work and become independent. But, it takes a personal commitment to start,” Cavazos said.

To accommodate those who could not attend in person, selected workshops were livestreamed and the recordings are archived on the Ability360 YouTube channel.

Plans are already underway for the Third Annual Latino Summit in September 2018.
Thank You for Another Year of Community Support

The 360Charity Golf Tournament presented by Lovitt & Touché was held Friday, September 22nd at Longbow Golf Club for the second year.

"Lovitt & Touché was honored to serve as the presenting sponsor for the 360Charity Golf Tournament. Ability360 holds a special place in our hearts, and it was with much pleasure that we helped the organization raise awareness and funds to support and empower people with disabilities," said Lovitt & Touché CEO, Charles Touché.

This year’s winning foursome was Josh Belkin, Morris Lippert, Blake Isakson and Tara Trzinski. Second place went to David Reese, Dr. Wayne Kuhl, Tim Bunn and Jason Graber.

Each foursome included a member of the Ability360 community, both members and staff with and without disabilities, to put our mission of being inclusive for all into action as well as have an opportunity to educate the other golfers on Ability360 throughout the round of golf. We were honored to have many of our sponsors return this year.

"This is my second year as a sponsor and participant of this great event. Ability360 provides an amazing platform for individuals with disabilities to become more independent. It also allows them to continue pursuing their dreams. I am very proud to be a part of this event and I look forward to continuing our support of Ability360 for years to come," said Keith Gapusan, President and CEO of P3 Capital Management, LLC.

The annual helicopter ball drop raffle was again a huge success with over 1,200 balls sold. The lucky first place winner of a Phoenix Suns luxury suite during the 2017-2018 season including 16 tickets and four parking passes was Katrina Hinsberg. The ultimate home tailgate party complete with a Sony 43-inch HD TV, catering services from Chef Michael and bartending services from Hey Bartender! LLC went to Jody Sarchett. And last but not least, Nick Pecors and a guest will enjoy the Greenskeeper package for two including one valet parking pass for Thursday, February 1, 2018 at the 2018 Waste Management Phoenix Open presented by the Ak-Chin Indian community. Special thanks to the Phoenix Suns, Acoustic Designs, Richard Howell, Chef Michael and Hey Bartender! LLC and Thunderbirds Charities for their generous donations to this fundraiser.

With the continued support of the community, Ability360 is impacting lives and growing daily! In the past year, membership has reached over 2,000 at the Sports & Fitness Center. The Center is gaining national attention and was the proud host of the USQRA National Quad Rugby Championships in April 2017. They will again host this event in April 2018.

"I’d like to thank all of our contributing sponsors, especially our lead sponsor Lovitt & Touché, and our event host, our friends at Longbow Golf Club. I would also like to thank all of our volunteers who have worked so hard to make today’s charity golf tournament a huge success. We are so grateful and appreciative of the generosity and support we have received," said Ability360’s President and CEO, Phil Pangrazio. 🎥

Sports Video Content Online
“Ability360 hosted a fantastic event and my team was excited to come out on top. We look forward to defending our championship next year at the 3rd annual event!” Josh Belkin said.

Bob Hobbs, Jr. drives towards the fairway.

The P3 Capital team of James Kelly, Corbin Beu, Keith Gapusan and Bob Hobbs, Jr. intently keep their eyes on the ball!

Photos by Johanna Huckeba
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Our sincere gratitude is extended to all of our generous sponsors. We would also like to thank our sponsors whose contributions were received after the printing deadlines of this publication.
TOGETHER, GREATNESS IS POSSIBLE

Cigna salutes Ability360 for helping people with disabilities reach their full potential. Together, we’re making the world a better place.

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It was a decision made 15,000 feet in the air.

Somewhere in the stratosphere between California and Arizona, the parents of 12-year-old Alicia Draper thumbed through an article as their plane transported them from one chapter of their life to the next. They had planned to move to the Grand Canyon state. What they hadn’t planned for was reading about Camelot, an organization dedicated to therapeutic horsemanship for children and adults with disabilities.

“Oh, this would be fun,” they told Draper, who has cerebral palsy. “You’ll get to ride horses and you’ll have a good time.”

Draper agreed. Then again, it wasn’t surprising. For most of her life, family decisions weren’t just made—they were made for her.

They applied to Camelot. Alicia was put on a waitlist and didn’t arrive until a year later.

The location of Camelot’s sole facility in Scottsdale, much like its mythological namesake, is hidden except to those on a mission to find it. The journey may involve sharing the road with a horse or the occasional tumbleweed.

By the time she stepped on the premises, Draper thought she had signed up for a glorified pony ride. She figured she’d just get on a horse, get off, maybe do some stretches and physical therapy, much like what she had already done in California.

Instead, she met Eileen Szychowski, the founder of Camelot. Szychowski, a self-proclaimed ‘walking quadriplegic,’ used crutches and according to Draper was both inspiring and intimidating.

“She was just a person that didn’t take no for an answer when it came to independence with people with disabilities, especially around horses,” Draper said.

It was no pony ride.

Draper’s schedule included grooming the horses, bonding and tacking, which meant putting on the saddle and bridle.

“If you couldn’t physically do it, you better know how to do it,” Draper said.

Students aren’t given a horse and left to fend for themselves, but they aren’t coddled either.

“We have a curriculum, so there’s no need to stress about it. But you are in charge,” Draper said.

It was a wake-up call Draper never knew she needed.

“You need to get yourself together,” Szychowski said. “You’re not even taking a shower by yourself.”

She was right.
Until then, Draper hadn’t been practicing any independent living skills. Seeing Szychowski’s control over eleven-hundred-pound horses with a physical disability stirred something inside her.

“I could draw strength from her,” Draper said.

Draper stayed in Camelot until she was 18. During that time, she learned how to drive with hand controls and mentored a girl with cerebral palsy who reminded her of when she first started.

Afterwards, Draper decided to get her associate’s degree. She then went on to earn her bachelor’s degree at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. From there she moved on to motivational speaking, even completing an exchange program in Mexico and working for Walt Disney World.

A decade after leaving Camelot, she woke up in the middle of the night.

“I really miss horses,” she said to herself. “I really miss being around Camelot.”

Draper holds a microphone close as she surveys her students from outside the arena. Their names are Kate and Karen and they lead their horses with Draper’s guidance.

Kate’s sitting up much straighter than last week. Karen’s looking more confident with the reins. Draper lets them know, her voice delicate yet firm.

“I’m going through the process to become a PATH Certified Instructor, which is the certification process called the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship,” Draper said.

It’s been seven years since she returned to Camelot. Szychowski had retired and passed on her executive director position to Mary Hadsall.

“I came on after she had already graduated as a student,” Hadsall said. “I’m very proud of her and it’s really been an honor to work alongside her.”

Much like the founder, Hadsall believes that at Camelot, every student has the right to risk.

“So many of our students are told, ‘no’ again and again based on the fact that they have a disability,” Hadsall said. “Here at Camelot, we try to think outside of the box and to really embrace our students’ right to risk, while providing the safest riding experience possible.”
Because parents are not allowed to observe the sessions, Hadsall says that Camelot also has an important lesson to teach parents: the importance of letting go.

"Our students have to work hard so that the victories that are achieved are truly theirs," Hadsall said. "For parents that are very protective it can be very challenging to trust and to let go. That's part of the whole process; it's not just the students that have to trust, the parents have to trust, the volunteers, everyone has to trust. It creates an intimacy that's very beautiful."

In the cool shadow of the Camelot barn, Draper leads a horse away. They don't speak, but move as one.

She is always in control.
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Business owner and inventor Casey Johansen has never applied for a job, though he’d been working since the age of 14.

“I was coming up on summertime out of school and [my dad] felt like I needed to get a few skills. And so he arranged for me to ride along with a truck driver.”

Johansen spent that summer at BCS Enterprises, a demolition company. He helped on the truck, swept up the shop and cleaned machinery. He did so well he was asked back during his holiday breaks and the next summer.

“It just felt like it was...like it was a place where I could work,” Johansen recalled. “I enjoyed it and it was hard work, but it was enjoyable and good people to work with. I never applied for a job in my life.”

Soon, Johansen graduated high school and began working full-time while earning his degree.

“I had started some school courses right after high school but ended up getting into a night school program to where I could work full time and still get my degree at night.”

Johansen, 38, is now the co-owner of that same company where he once swept floors.

“They encouraged me to get the degree and get some business knowledge,” Johansen said. “I started doing a
“He just sits back and thinks his way through [obstacles],” said Clint Cole, BCS superintendent. “He just gets it done.”

Johansen had worked as a laborer for Cole when he was first hired at 14 years old. Cole described Johansen as an “amazing guy and good friend.”

For the next seven and a half hours, Valley rescue crews from Mesa to Peoria worked with Phoenix Fire Department to free him from under 200 tons of concrete and twisted metal. His family gathered along with a chaplain and then-Mayor Phil Gordon to wait. A trauma team from Good Samaritan Hospital arrived on scene to control his pain and blood loss during the extrication. His father stayed at his side for the duration. Johansen was conscious the whole time.

“I didn’t understand the gravity of the situation. As the day went on I kind of felt like it was getting a little more
serious. My arm was pretty badly injured. I lost a lot of the muscle in my arm." Johansen said.

Johansen spent six weeks in the hospital. First, in an induced coma during which both his legs were amputated near the hip, then ICU for several weeks before three weeks of rehab. Johansen never doubted he'd be back at work.

"I was back at the office like September 21st." 48 days later.

"We always knew he was coming back." Cole said.

Days are long and start early for Johansen, who gets up at 5 o'clock and often spends all day supervising crews until his day ends 12 hours later. Sometimes, he'll get in the excavator himself and run it.

"He isn't shy about working hard." Cole said. "If we're shorthanded, he'll jump in the cab and run a machine. He's a good operator."

Johansen tried prosthetics, but the level of his amputation coupled with the bone and muscle damage rendered the devices unsuccessful.

"I just didn't feel like it was gonna bring me enough mobility. I said, I gotta try something else. I need something else that's gonna get me where I'm gonna go quicker than this."

Johansen traded his hard hat for a thinking cap and modified a Segway to suit his needs around his home and on the job site.

"...Typically when you start hill climbing on your chair, you're leaned back. This one stays upright, completely upright, no matter how steep the hill is. So I found I could climb like 30 percent grade with it, which is quite amazing."

Johansen turned his creation into the Ally Chair, a Segway conversion kit that adds a steering device and a kickstand of sorts for when the user is at rest. He uses his Ally Chair when he visits other newly-injured people.

"Sometimes somebody that's having a hard time can see that it's okay. I mean is it was kinda early on and I was there [at the VA hospital] and there was a newly injured amputee, similar to me. He comes into the room and he's pretty fresh and new at that, he's in his regular chair and he sees me and I'm zipping around. He's looking at me close and he goes, 'I think it's gonna be okay.' That's really what sparked my interest in working with the veterans at Segs for Vets."

Segs4Vets now owns the rights to the chair and distributes them to veterans through their non-profit organization.

The Ally Chair is not Johansen's only invention. He also built a crane to lift his Segway into his truck and modified a 45-foot RV, adding a swing arm lift. He builds tools and attachments for his company's heavy equipment. He explains "I enjoy just more tweaking and designing these little tools. Like for instance a big misting fan for an excavator to keep dust down."

Cole too talks about the RainMaker that Johansen designed. "It frees up a laborer on site and it allows them to stay back further. We use a bunch of things that Casey's dreamed up."

Coles sums up. "This accident barely slowed him down. We can't keep up with him."

As to the advice he offers to those newly injured people he meets Johansen says, "I just would hope that they could see that it's gonna be okay. There is life after an injury. There's hope, there's still a good quality of life available. Yeah, you gotta find a way. It's not as easy. But I don't know ... I feel like the hard things in life make us stronger. Calm seas don't make a good captain."
Actions speak louder than words. Lisa epitomizes what many people with a disability can achieve regardless of their disability. Lisa works directly with SSDI/SSI beneficiaries to achieve or return to self-supporting work. When advising the Ability360 Employment Services consumers with whom she works, the discussion is 95 percent non-disability related. Somehow she has the ability to instill an “I can work” attitude and demonstrates it herself. She does not need to discuss her own disability. It is not very relevant to what she does in life, and it is evidenced in her actions. She’s a workforce professional, wife, mother, advocate, and she blushes easily. We are really lucky she chose to be part of the A360 team. ~Susan Webb

**Employee Spotlight**

**Lisa Purdy** Lead Employment Coordinator

_How long have you been with Ability360?_ 13 years

**What’s your current job title?** Lead Employment Coordinator for the Ticket to Work program

**What other job titles have you held, if any?** I started in December 2004 as the Program Aide for the Employment department and now I’m the Lead Employment Coordinator

**For people outside of the organization, what do you do?** At the Ticket to Work program, I help people who receive SSI or SSDI return to work. I screen consumers, host orientations and meet one-on-one to help them through our Employment Network. I assess their skills for the job market and keep track of consumer benefits and earnings when they return to work. I also advocate for them when they run into problems with the SSA.

**Is there a work achievement you’re especially proud of?** I think being at this organization for 13 years is pretty great. I have definitely grown throughout the years.

**What brought you here?** After I graduated from ASU, I went to a job fair where I listened to Rhonda Webb’s presentation about returning to work while on benefits. She gave me a pamphlet about Ticket to Work and I came in for a presentation with Susan Webb, who had an open position for Program Aide at the time. I applied and the rest is history.

**What do you like most about your work?** No two days are the same. I like seeing consumers grow more confident as they return to full-time employment. I can say that every week I continue to learn more about my job and ways to assist others.

**Will you share a little something about your family?** I am originally from Illinois and moved to Arizona in high school. I met my husband when we were in college and we have been married for 10 years. We have an 8-year-old daughter who keeps us busy and entertained on a daily basis. We bought our first house in April 2015 which is a never-ending project of updates.

**Will you tell us about your best day ever?** I’ve been blessed to have too many to choose just one.

**What are people most surprised to know about you?** I’m very friendly and can have a one-on-one conversation with just about anyone but if I am in front of a crowd, no matter how well I know the subject, I forget my own name! I have definitely improved over the years but it still terrifies me.

**Is there a movie or TV show you drop everything to watch?** I have loved the movie The Goonies since I was very little and know probably every word.

**If a mega-fortune fell into your lap, what would you do?** Travel the world with my family. 😊
Ready to work?

Ticket To Work in 5 fast facts:

○ TTW helps job seekers on SSI/SSDI start or return to self-supporting work.
○ Participating in TTW does not risk your SSA or healthcare benefits.
○ Ability360 Employment Services offers benefits management, job search, and job retention services to those who qualify for TTW.
○ Jobs under TTW are diverse based on your individual knowledge, skills, education, and employment history.
○ Ability360 services are long-term, up to 60 months.

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ADS
Tiger Desmarais is the eyes, hands and wheels of all future customers of Phoenix’s Vantage Mobility International (VMI).

His duties as VMI’s technical support expert and trainer include being “test pilot” for VMI developers’ ideas and designs.

“Whatever I do, I try to make things easier for everybody to understand what [people with disabilities] face,” he said.

VMI hired Desmarais in 1995 as an electrical technician on the production line installing harnesses and electrical components.

“Within a couple of weeks, I had solved three of their largest electrical issues. They immediately gave me a raise and said, ‘please stay’ and so I’ve been here ever since.”

His life and career took a new direction when he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2002. MS is an autoimmune disease where scar tissue in the brain and spinal column disrupt the electrical communication pathways between the brain and muscles. Finding a cure for MS has eluded researchers because each MS sufferer has his or her own symptoms and severities. Desmarais has Relapsing Remitting MS where physical abilities suddenly go away. For some, those abilities return. Not for Desmarais.

“The first couple of years were tough because I found when I had an exacerbation, I wouldn’t get everything back. The first episode took away my ability to walk any distances. I’m (now) numb from the chest down. I’ve lost a little vision in my eyes and feeling in my hands over the years. But my mind has always been good.”

Taking Tysabri has slowed his MS’s progression and stabilized his symptoms, he said.

Many companies turn away from employees with a chronic illness, but Vantage Mobility International has turned Desmarais’ permanent disability into a strength.
Tiger Desmarais’ legal name is Roger Desmarais, Jr.

“My father and I worked in the same shop for many years. When someone called out for Roger, they usually got two ‘Whats’ in return.

“My sisters gave me the nickname Tiger because I apparently used to growl as an infant. Over time, everybody came to know me as Tiger. My wife didn’t know my real name until I let her borrow my car and I gave her my credit card to get gas.

“Tiger is my ‘professional name.’ It’s how I’m known in the industry.”

VMI’s own “life story” is one of finding unique ways to adapt to one’s unexpected challenges. In 1984, three Montana farmers built a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) for a friend who was permanently injured in a fall. They partnered with a Phoenix limousine manufacturer because it had the equipment and knowledge necessary to safely adapt an Oldsmobile Toronado for a new purpose.

“They said, ‘we want (their friend) to come into the vehicle from a ramp,’ and they developed some really bad, awful looking car,” VMI’s President and CEO, Doug Eaton, said. “It was very raw and entrepreneurial – the wild wild west, no rules, no boundaries, no competition – very grassroots organization that has grown into a very mature, stable industry. They had a lot of amazing energy and were very creative. I give those founders a lot of credit for what we are today.”

At that time, Chrysler introduced the minivan, which VMI’s founders found was more amenable for their needs. Today, VMI’s 250 employees annually renovate between 4,000 and 5,000 Chrysler, Dodge, Toyota and Honda minivans in its 86,000-square foot building in South Phoenix.

“We had to overcome immense challenges to go from a crude mom and pop technology to what we are today,” Eaton said. “We have a client base with complex medical needs. How do you best serve them? We have fierce competition. There are some ‘800-pound gorillas’ out there. It’s good to have competition; they make us better. We have daunting regulations from NHTSA (National Highway Transit System Authority) and eTA (Electronic Travel Authorization in Canada). The growth and advancements in audio visual and safety devices are astronomical. I compare it to a heart transplant. You get one chance to do it right, but the reward is the client gets a lot of freedom.”

With their eyes on future possibilities and hands-on attention to the present, Vantage Mobility International is striving to expand opportunities and experiences for people with disabilities.
Welcome to the newest edition of LivAbility
LivAbility is an Arizona-based quarterly lifestyle magazine for people with disabilities. Each edition contains articles that promote an active, fulfilling lifestyle for every ability.
If you’re fortunate enough to have your sight, reading braille may seem like an impossible new “language.” Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS) Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) counselor, Vasant Garcia, knows the challenges of learning to read by touch. She lives with a progressive visual impairment and started learning to read and write braille in fourth grade. She now teaches it to her clients.

“I have had the best of both worlds and now I want to help people achieve their independence,” Garcia explained. “My goal is to keep people doing whatever they want to be doing and to relieve their families.”

As an RSA counselor and certified rehabilitation therapist, Garcia’s job is to help clients with visual impairments attain independent living skills. She understands the challenges that come with losing one’s sight later in life.

On average, it takes a person approximately six to 12 months to learn to read either one of the two “levels” of the raised dots. “Uncontracted” refers to the basic alphabet. It’s a letter for letter substitution and is the foundation of the braille code. “Contracted” braille is a speedier version that uses symbols and contractions to replace commonly used words and letters.

Magnifying equipment is often provided to clients with low-vision to help them read.

“Clients want to read their mail and tell time,” Garcia said. “We have talking clocks and watches that we can give them.”

Other tools are also available. A writing guide is used to make sure written lines are straight, and talking labeling devices help individuals brand anything from medications to condiments and spices. Garcia points out that it’s crucial to have information like expiration dates easily identifiable for the visually impaired. RSA also has mobility specialists’ on-hand to provide canes and other specialty mobility equipment to clients when needed.

Additionally, Garcia helps her clients learn or re-learn how to cook, navigate their homes and much more. She utilizes specialized tools to help individuals function independently whether it is in the comfort of their own home or in the workplace.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) strengthens the state by helping its clients reach their full potential through self-sufficiency. Counselors within RSA serve clients with disabilities and create individualized plans to meet each person’s unique goals and needs. Arizonans living with visual impairments can receive assistance to complete their educational and employment goals and develop skills to live as independently as possible.

For more information about the RSA program, des.az.gov/services/employment/arizona-rehabilitation-services
Politically and economically empowering those with disabilities.

CHICANOS POR LA CAUSA
Why did you start ParaSportsLive?
I’ve been broadcasting power soccer since 2013. People from around the world watch these live streams, especially big events. They mention how great it is to be able to watch. I started thinking about other adaptive sports and how great it would be to bring what we’ve done with power soccer, to these other sports. There are so many competitions taking place that no one will ever see, unless they’re there. I want ParaSportsLive to change that.

How did you get into broadcasting?
Sometimes, people would tell me that I have a great voice and should work in radio, but I never listened to them. I still don’t! Anyway, I was working in Phoenix and finally decided to see if radio was an actual possibility. So, I quit my job, majored in broadcast journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and started working at the ASU radio station. I loved it! Shout out to Blaze Radio! While in school, I looked for radio jobs, but it just wasn’t happening, so my radio career ended when I graduated. A couple years later, the folks at Power Soccer Shop asked if I would broadcast the power soccer nationals, as they knew I had a background in radio. I said “yes” and the rest is history.

What has been your favorite event to cover so far?
Rio was a blast, but calling the World Cup this July in Florida was definitely my favorite. It was the sport’s biggest event and I was there to share it with fans around the world. It was a huge honor and I’m already looking forward to the next one in four years.

So, you used to work at Ability360?
I did! I was one of the first two receptionists at the Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center when it opened in 2011 and I loved working there. While I was there, I also started what became the Ability360 United and Ability360 FC power soccer teams and I used to help with marketing and graphic design. It was hard to leave, but it’s great to see that place still doing awesome work.

What is your goal for ParaSportsLive?
I want to broadcast adaptive sports around the world. I want to cover so many events, that ParaSportsLive will need teams of broadcasters made up of talented people with and without disabilities. There are so many talented people who just need an opportunity to show what they can do. ParaSportsLive will give people that chance.

Is there anything else?
I have a GoFundMe campaign to help get ParaSportsLive off the ground. I want high-quality productions, but it’s not cheap. People can visit gofundme.com/parasportslive to learn more and make a contribution. Thanks for chatting with me and sharing my story!

You can catch Tony’s first live event on October 22 at ParaSportsLive.com. Congratulations Tony!
CELEBRATING 5 YEARS

by Nick Pryor

The Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center is planning its fifth year of an all adaptive sports tournament, Duel in the Desert.

In its first year, it was a one-day event that attracted nine teams and around 100 athletes in three sports. It has then since grown to a two-day event. The bar is set high this year with close to 20 teams and 160 athletes in four sports. What started as a contest to see who was the best in Arizona, has turned into a sought-after destination for teams across the Southwest.

The athletes will compete in wheelchair basketball, power soccer and wheelchair rugby. In the tournament’s third year 3on3 StandUp Amputee Basketball was added to the list.

"The best part of Duel, in my opinion, is the amount of adaptive sports all happening in just two days," said Kelsey Bocken, Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center staff member.

"I doubt that happens anywhere except the Paralympics. I think this tournament will turn into a week-long tournament at some point."

In the tournament’s five years it has seen award ceremonies, giveaways, raffles, food trucks and an adaptive car show. It includes athletes with all ability levels, from just starting to Paralympic competitors.

"It’s like nothing else out there in competition."

“I’ve participated every year and to see all the people competing and at a high level, it’s one of the most spirit-lifting experiences you can be a part of and witness,” said Paul Rodriguez III, wheelchair basketball athlete and Ability360 volunteer.

Come check out this year’s Duel in the Desert to see who will take home the Golden Sombrero. Then, join the athletes, staff, volunteers, families and friends for the rooftop after-party.
There's no denying that life can be a real challenge at times. That's why AARP continues its legacy of caring by combating hunger, helping people fight age discrimination, providing caregiver resources and helping people get back to work. Because when everyone reaches their full potential, society can reach its full potential. If you don't think Real Possibilities when you think AARP, then you don't know “aarp.”

See what we’re doing to help at aarp.org/phoenix
Join Arizona Disabled Sports at Tempe Town Lake for the fourth annual Pedal N’ Paddle Fest on Saturday, Oct. 21! Take a spin around the lake in style with an adaptive cycle and then cruise the waters by kayak or dragon boat. This unique event is open to everyone with a physical disability and it only costs eight dollars! Caregivers, family members and friends may also participate for twelve dollars.

Sponsored by the Arizona Disabled Sports and Arizona Dragon Boat Association, this is your opportunity to enjoy the lake. Try out adaptive cycling and kayaking with Arizona Disabled Sports. Plus, it’s the perfect chance to experience the ancient sport of dragon boat racing as you paddle together with a team to propel a long boat.

All participants will be given the chance to participate in adaptive cycling and either kayaking or dragon boat racing. All guests will receive an event t-shirt and a picnic lunch sponsored by a local vendor. Dragon boat participants must have complete trunk control with upright sitting independence, but kayaking is open to all ability levels.

Join Arizona Disabled Sports and Arizona Dragon Boat Association from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the SRP Tempe Town Lake Marina and enjoy October’s outdoor fun!

Please contact Arizona Disabled Sports at 480-835-6273 for registration and additional information.

Photo courtesy of AZDS
How Are We Doing?

LivAbility Magazine is interested in your thoughts, comments, gripes, concerns, suggestions and ideas for future stories. Send us an email and we will do our best to keep improving with each edition.

Published “letters to the editor” will include first name, last initial and city, if known.

editor@ability360.org

CALLING ALL CREATIVES! LivAbility has a space for you.

We’re on the lookout for talented contributors in every part of our great state to help keep our readers up to date on the people and events that impact our community. We’re always eager to meet writers, photographers, videographers and illustrators who tell the stories of people with disabilities. Contact us to discuss a submission.

360Perspectives publishes personal essays on YOUR disability experience. Tell us in less than 300 words. Make us laugh, make us cry, make us angry or curious. Start a conversation... YOU are the expert on your own disability experience. Let’s talk!

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SAVE THE DATE!
Thank You Veterans!

Ability360 proudly supports our military service members by offering numerous programs for veterans, currently serving military and their families where we embrace the spirit of Invictus (Latin for "unconquered") every day.

The Invictus Games, held this year in Toronto, Sept. 23-30, are an international Paralympic-caliber event, envisioned by Prince Harry of Wales, in which disabled armed services personnel and veterans from 16 countries participate.

We congratulate Arizona’s own, retired Marine Sgt. Gabby Graves-Wake for her impressive showing in multiple events. This Paralympic athlete is training for Women’s Sled Hockey (2018), Swimming and Track & Field (2020).

Gabby’s photo has special meaning for us here at LivAbility. It was taken by Courtney Verrill.
The University of Arizona
Creates First Accessible
Geoscience Study Abroad Course

by Angeline Carbajal

The University of Arizona has created the first accessible geoscience study abroad program. Accessible Earth offers students the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in the geoscience field, all while living in Orvieto, Italy.

The two-year-old UA course is designed to fulfill a capstone requirement for geoscience for geoscience programs, traditionally known as field camp. The camps are about six-weeks long and usually involve strenuous activity, such as hiking and camping for weeks on end.

“The title Accessible Earth has a duel meaning,” said Rick Bennett, UA professor of geosciences and lead instructor of the course. “We are allowing students to access and synthesize data from anywhere on Earth, while providing a course option that is more accessible than a traditional geology field camp.”

A total of eight students participated in the program, two of whom were injured previously while participating in a field camp.

“Last year I attempted the well-known high-class UA Geology Field camp, but unfortunately developed a back injury and had to go home half way through the program. It was hard dealing with that, despite the fact that I did nothing wrong, and I was terrified that I would have to do it all over again, already in pain,” said Nina Kolodji, UA geology and planetary science major.

Options were limited to students who could not participate in field camp before Accessible Earth was created. At the UA, the Disability Resource Center would work with disabled students to find a professor who had a research opportunity for the student to participate in.

“The DRC was not satisfied with those outcomes for students because they weren’t similar experiences other students would have at field camp,” said Diedre Lamb, assistant director at UA DRC.

The program was a collaboration between the UA geoscience department, DRC and the Study Abroad program in the hopes of broadening participation in geoscience across all demographics.

“There is a little bit of research to suggest that different demographics avoid geoscience because of the perception that it’s only for people who enjoy climbing rocks and being outdoors,” Bennett said.

“One student described field camp as hazing. I never thought of it that way, but in some sense field camp is sort of described as a rite of passage.”

Among the sciences, geoscience has the least diverse student and faculty population. The culture is mostly white male, but participation of females has increased to about 40 percent in recent years. However, other facets of diversity are not represented, Bennett said.

Course Design

Though the design of Accessible Earth varies from field camp, the curriculum students are presented with is not easy.
"Students synthesize their knowledge and gain familiarity with data analysis tools that they might not have seen in field camp. Traditional geoscience curriculum focuses a little bit more on field observations and this course focuses on remote sensing or gathering information from satellites or ground based networks of instruments for which the data are downloaded and archived in national archives," Bennett said.

Students utilize data from NASA, the European Space Agency and the National Science Foundation to create their final projects for the course. There is a lot of computer programming involved. Most field camps are based on solely mapping data, which doesn’t allow students to explore other areas of geology.

"Going into Accessible Earth, not doing any mapping was kind of nice because that’s not something I want to do in the future," said Lizbeth Murillo, a UA geology graduate.

"I think I got a step ahead in the sense that I got to see that there’s more to geology than mapping. There’s all these cool things you can do, especially now with technology advancing."

"We’re all in a bus and we stay in different hotels. There are a lot of sites along the way and some are actual destinations," Lamb said. "We took them through the Alps where we saw a glacier melting and to the marble quarries of northern Italy."

**Application**

The deadline to apply is February 25 and the program takes place from late June through the beginning of August. The early deadline allows coordinators of the program to make sure all aspects are accessible and inclusive for everyone.

From Monday through Thursday, students attend morning classes and have discussions in the afternoon. Most of the hands-on work is done outside of the classroom. Students are given the opportunity to travel on their own. There is also a five-day field trip across northern Italy.
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I watched a moving video about people with disabilities in Bolivia petitioning their government to provide a small monthly pension to the citizens with disabilities living in poverty. They traveled for days on foot and wheeled through the mountains to participate in sit-ins and camp out for more than 30 days; risking their lives to stand up for Bolivians with disabilities. It reminds me of the thousands of Americans with disabilities who fought long and hard to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In recent years, Ability360 has hosted international disability advocates wanting to learn from American disability advocates. They come to study our programs and services and take ideas back home. Over time, this connection to my brothers and sisters with disabilities all over the world has deepened my awareness of how fortunate America is with our accessible buses, accessible businesses, civil rights laws and Social Security Insurance programs that provide funding to support people when they're unable to work. The assistive technology that is available through social programs and affordable loans is rare in many countries. Most international visitors report little government support for disability programs and resources. Only a few provide funding for Centers like Ability360 that promote independent living and self-determination. Many lack any civil rights protections at all.

These disability advocates are real heroes. They go back home to start or expand disability sports programs, peer support programs furthering their civil rights advocacy and recognition of the dignity of people with disabilities. They go back with a renewed understanding of the value of peer support and working together across disability constituencies replicating what has proven so successful here.

It is a privilege to meet these disability advocates from places like Zimbabwe, Madagascar, India, Japan and Taiwan that we need to share widely. We are helping plant seeds that will grow in these countries to better the lives of people with disabilities. They are now our friends and we are invested in their progress. Our community needs more opportunities to meet these international advocates and hear firsthand what it's like in their country and their impressions of the U.S.

It has become clear to me that we all experience ableism – that destructive concept that people with disabilities aren’t whole, aren’t valuable, are defective, burdensome and incapable. We all experience the damage those concepts inflict by perpetuating barriers and dependence and even worse, our own less than positive self-concepts. Those negative stereotypes are killers – literally. They lead to the concept that people with disabilities are better off dead than disabled, feeding the physician-assisted suicide movement and allow governments to condone the mistreatment of people with disabilities.

So, in the coming months you’ll see invitations to meet the international disability advocates who sometimes single-handedly started up programs in their countries to benefit the lives of people with disabilities. Many have won international scholarships to come and learn from us. They need to meet you. They want to meet you. Take an action to meet them and you will be forever changed like I have.

by Amina Donna Kruck

VP of Advocacy
Ability360
MANDELA WASHINGTON FELLOWSHIP CONTINUES PARTNERSHIP WITH ABILITY360

by Sarah Olson

I traveled to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe to work with Nyasha, my Mandela mentee to help create and implement sport clinics for youth with disabilities. Ability360 supplied his program with equipment for the clinics including basketballs, volleyballs, tennis racquets, tennis balls and colored jerseys.

The impact that sports has played in my own life is significant. Through sports I met lifelong friends and learned discipline and dedication. I was able to apply that discipline and dedication to my studies, career and my life. Traveling to Zimbabwe to share my passion for sports and for people with disabilities and being able to create similar opportunities through sports for youth in Bulawayo was nothing short of amazing.

I met Alwandee, a young lady entering fifth grade and the only female participant we had at the clinic. She started off very shy and didn’t say much, through her interactions with the coaches and other participants she left with an enormous smile that could light up the space. Her spirit exemplified why I chose this career and confirmed that my work in Zimbabwe was successful. Overall, the participants were wonderful. The older kids did a great job including the younger kids and helping them learn the games and have fun. This is a great step to guide the older kids to become peer mentors. We haven’t heard the last from Nyasha. Ability360 remains committed to Nyasha and his programs to ensure youth with disabilities in Bulawayo have an opportunity for sport and recreation.

This exchange has impacted the way I think and approach helping those that do not live in the same area, but want to accomplish the same goals. While I may not be able to assist with equipment or monetary donations, I can still assist them by sharing my knowledge and passion for people with disabilities. Together we can make a better and brighter future for everyone.

by April Reed

I traveled to Madagascar through the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders 2016 Reciprocal Exchange Program to work with mentee, Holiniaina, Holi for short, to create a peer mentoring program for her country.

I found a disability community open to peer support and a community that understands and wants to address the challenges their people are facing. I was excited when these leaders wanted to discuss coalition building and how they could work together in community advocacy efforts.

It was a privilege to work with Holi and to host the training for her MERCI staff. Holi is a dynamic, passionate leader for her staff and community; I know that MERCI will be a great host for the Peer Mentor Program.

After the Peer Mentor training, Holi got a call from one of the ladies who attended and is blind. This newly-trained mentor described reaching out to a lady in her neighborhood whom she had just heard was losing her sight. She approached the women as a mentor and asked if she would like to talk. This new mentor actually brought the lady to the final meeting Holi and I held at a Women’s Group. The new mentor was thrilled that she could offer help and the mentee told us that she had been so scared and did not know that there were programs for people who were blind. So that was our first mentoring match!

The community meetings/tours Holi arranged for me gave me a better understanding of the challenges and sheer determination that these administrators, teacher and rehabilitation hospital workers provide to support people with disabilities. At times, I was overwhelmed by the great need, but always appreciative of the resilience of the people and most of all convinced of the opportunity Madagascar has for real change. I look forward to continuing to mentor Holi and MERCI and I am excited to see what they will do next.
In Mauritius, people with disabilities do not have access to public transportation and are often unable to access certain public places. Determined to help those with disabilities, Jean-Francois Favory applied to be a part of the 2017 Mandela Washington Fellowship Program. Among 60 thousand applications, Favory was one of the thousand people selected.

As part of this rigorous program, Favory is learning how independent living is made possible for those with disabilities. Favory became paraplegic at the age of seven years old after a medical error occurred during a surgical procedure in his home country of Mauritius. Along with being an advocate for independent living, Favory is a skilled wheelchair-basketball player.

In hopes of bringing awareness to the issues in his country, Favory will file a petition for the 2019 Indian Ocean Island Games to include wheelchair basketball. Favory’s hope is to use the sport of basketball to show his country that people with disabilities are capable of doing many things. On Sept. 15, Favory will return to Mauritius to continue his journey in pursuing independent living for all.

Kenji Hamano and Kyota Yagi made history on July 23: they met with other Independent Living leaders in Washington D.C. to form the World Independent Living Network that seeks to unite people with disabilities and Centers for Independent Living across the globe. Together, they visited Ability360 as cultural ambassadors to learn more about our disability community in the U.S. and to share a little about theirs.

Yagi is the social media and web specialist for his center in Iroha. He says the biggest obstacle facing the disability community in Japan is attendant care.

"Because the government doesn’t pay for services for people with disabilities, the cost of attendant care comes out of our own pockets. This makes it difficult for people to get the care they need," Yagi said through translator Ayumi Miyachi.

Hamano, the head of his center’s Personal Attendant Services Program, shared a different answer to this question: mentality.

"People with disabilities sometimes don’t think they can work or live independently," he said.

Hamano described how people with disabilities in Japan are sometimes hidden away by their families, or overlooked by employers who assume they can’t work.

"There is a lot of work to do in changing attitudes," he said – of which Amina Kruck, Vice President of Advocacy at Ability360, replied, “That sounds familiar.”

In addition to meeting with staff and touring our facilities, Hamano and Yagi also visited the Musical Instrument and Heard museums, rode the light rail, and hung out with Ability360’s resident wheelchair rugby team, 360Heat.
Instagram is the 3rd largest social media website in the country behind Facebook and YouTube. Its over 700 million users post photos and short videos, letting viewers into their lives and sharing their experiences. Many use the site as a platform to connect with niche communities. The disabled community is growing its presence online. Whether through viral hashtags like #disabledandcute or #amputeeproblems, people are using their platform to destigmatize and celebrate the community. Below are some of our favorites.

**aannggeeellll**

757 posts  
10.1k followers  
1,099 following

**Angel Giuffria Actress**, Congenital amputee, Public Speaker, Psyc grad student, Rep’d by @KMRtalent #bionicactress  
www.imdb.com/name/nm6262260

**adelfos_kitchen**

2,940 posts  
28.9k followers  
1,907 following  

Adelfo Cerame Jr. IFBB wheelchair Pro Pro Ballroom Dancer B.S. In Nutrition Science Physical Culture Enthusiast @Inspirednutra @Adelfos_Kitchen_ProShop

**jbone89**

2,806 posts  
139k followers  
1,023 following

Jordan Bone Makeup & Motivation YouTuber & Published Author  
Twitter @JordanBone1  
SC Jordipie89 BLOG  
JordansBeautifulLife.com
Tommy Edison
Blind Film Critic, YouTuber, Radio Personality, and Public Speaker
www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlA7ZhiW4g

blindfilmcritic
963 posts 32.3k followers 8 following

the_bipolar_barbie
471 posts 45.7k followers 4,134 following
Mental Health Advocate
Documenting my journey to Wellness
Qualification? LIVED EXPERIENCE!

zach.anner
71 posts 30.1k followers 44 following
Zach Anner Host/hosted Have a Little Faith, Workout Wednesday and Riding Shotgun on Youtube & Rollin’ with Zach on OWN. He’s also an author. http://youtube.com/zachanner

lopez.oew
717 posts 31.3k followers 306 following
Jonathan Lopez Veteran, Father CADIRA MD, #CADIRAHERO Military Muscle Foundation Oscar Mike Foundation Operation Enduring Warrior #DIEFIRSTTHENQUIT
youtu.be/kDzwIbxw1pvk

casarjacobson
937 posts 75.7k followers 2,150 following
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Ability360 Introduces the Community Leadership Academy

Leadership Training Program for PWD

Ability360 kicked off its new advocacy training: the Community Leadership Academy. The Community Leadership Academy is a free, six-week course that will train people with disabilities to serve in leadership roles on nonprofit and government boards; adding their voices to public policy-making.

"Less than 1 percent of leadership roles in government are held by people with disabilities," said Megan Granata, the Academy's head trainer. "Decisions that affect our lives and communities in big ways are being made without us. That's why it's crucial that we, as people with disabilities, have a spot at the table.”

Academy participants will have opportunities to learn necessary leadership skills such as fundraising, networking and the fundamentals of board membership, as well as hear from community leaders with disabilities currently working in nonprofits and government.

Classes are currently running and will be held again in the spring. For more information and to apply online, visit ability360.org/CLA.

Sarah Kader Honored with Newly-Created Advocacy Award

Sarah Kader, staff attorney at Arizona Center for Disability Law received the Arizona Disability Coalition's 2017 Advocacy Award for her "passion and relentless pursuit of justice for people with disabilities in Arizona.”

Kader’s long-term work on legislative advocacy and her service on the Tempe’s Disability Concerns Commission were cited as factors in honoring her with the inaugural award.

"We are thankful for her hard work, commitment, and passion for civil rights." Said Larry Wanger of ADC.

Kader also teaches an online disabilities studies course to undergraduates as an adjunct professor at Northern Arizona University.

Photo by Clinton McDaniel
Café Cultivate Opening at Ability360 Center

Gregory and Juli Bryan’s love for the food and hospitality industry began in 2016 when they helped their son Oliver, a survivor of traumatic brain injury, open Oliver’s Sophisticated Bean, a coffee shop in downtown Phoenix.

During this time frame, they met Steve Norton, chef and stroke survivor, through the Healthy Living class series offered by Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona. Norton was planning to open a coffee shop at the Ability360 Center and invited the Bryans to join his venture. During development Norton realized that coaching and mentoring survivors of brain injury was his higher calling. With Norton’s encouragement, the Bryans continued on with his vision.

Our menu is clean and locally sourced and our coffee is fabulous!” Juli Bryan said, “We want this to be a welcoming space, a place to just kick back and enjoy the day.”

The trio named this enterprise “Café Cultivate,” a nod to their desire to cultivate and change lives by supporting the disability community. The café is slated to open mid-October. Follow them on Facebook or at CafeCultivate.com.

Ashley Bridwell 40 Under 40

Congratulations to Ability360 Board member Ashley Bridwell for her recognition by the Phoenix Business Journal as one of 2017’s 40 Under 40. This designation honors individuals under the age of 40 who have major impact in the Valley. And she certain has.

A social worker and rehab program coordinator at Barrow Outpatient Neuro-Rehabilitation Center and Barrow Concussion and Brain Injury Center, Bridwell identified a causal link between domestic violence, brain injury and homelessness and helped create a program to address the issue. She was also honored in 2016 by Valley YWCA for her work.

In addition to her community service, she has presented trainings on brain injury to the police departments in the Valley and recently to the Office of Victims Assistance of the FBI.

Darrel Christenson Elected NCIL Treasurer

Darrel Christenson, vice president of community integration at Ability360, was elected treasurer of the (NCIL) National Council on Independent Living.

Christenson has been an NCIL Board Member-at-Large for the past three years and has served on its Housing Sub-Committee for nine years.

He is an active member of the Arizona Fair Housing Partnership, which educates members of the Arizona housing industry about the benefits and requirements of accessible, affordable housing.
For Tom and Sharon Lopeman, life in Prescott revolves around sled hockey.

At 72, Tom is the oldest member of the Phoenix Coyotes Sled Hockey team and the teammate that travels the farthest – 220 miles – to and from practice in Scottsdale.

“I feel so free out on the ice,” he said.

After a stellar high school football and pole vaulting career in Bellevue, Ohio, Tom earned a football scholarship at Eastern Arizona College and later one for the University of Nevada at Reno.

But before he could get to UNR, he was drafted to the U.S. Marines and sent to Pearl Harbor. There he married his high school sweetheart, Sharon Bykerk. In 1969, three months before the end of his time in the Marines and return to Reno, Tom was in a head-on motorcycle accident.

“Football was out of the picture and my body has been under repair ever since,” he said.

Doctors treated 35 fractures. Six pins and numerous skin grafts held together his left foot. Nerve damage affected his right eye and shoulder and a valve in his heart, which has now has been replaced three times with heart valves from pigs.

In 2000, doctors recommended the amputation of both of Tom’s legs.

“I’m provided with two artificial legs from Hanger Prosthetics and opportunities,” he said.

“The opportunity to enter the National Veterans Arts Festival and win five gold medals. The opportunity to attend the Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and discover fewer boundaries. The opportunity to participate in water and snow skiing, kayaking, hand cycling and sled hockey. The ability to be a volunteer pole vault coach at Prescott High School for 20 years.”

“A pole vault coach with no legs! How crazy is that?” Sharon Lopeman adds.

Sled hockey drives Tom today. Using roller skate wheels, he invented a device that lets him practice, usually by himself, at the roller hockey rink in Prescott. With hand flippers he created, he developed a water-resistance training regimen to strengthen the muscles he uses for skating and shooting. And a strict diet and vitamins lets him stay off medicines and be “as fit as possible to continue playing sled hockey.”

“I want to show the younger players they can play this sport for as long as they want. It’s all a mental thing. And I hope the Prescott VA, soon, can form its own sled hockey program. The key is to get sleds.”
Phoenix Sled Hockey Team Vies for 2017/18 Championship Title

by Scott Daravanis

The Arizona Coyotes have not, as of yet, brought the Stanley Cup to the desert.

But that does not mean there hasn’t been success on the ice for Phoenix.

The Phoenix Coyotes Sled Hockey team is preparing for a third consecutive Pacific Sled Hockey League championship, a second championship at the USA Hockey Sled Classic and to improve on its runner-up finish at the USA Hockey Disabled Festival.

“When we started out, it was pretty rough, but we improved at our own rate,” Team Captain Paul Crane said.

Sled hockey started in Arizona as a Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department program. In 2004, Phoenix’s Corbin Beu, Adam Conrardy and Prescott’s Tom Lopeman went to a winter sports clinic in Aspen, Colo. When they returned Beu, Conrardy, Lopeman and others began organizing the team and looking for sponsors to buy equipment and cover ice rental and tournament fees.

The 15 men and women on the Coyote roster have some form of physical or mental disability. Rules allow teams to have up to two members without disabilities so long as they play in a sled. Teams may also have “pushers” to propel a teammate in a sled.

“We’re always looking for new players, through invitation or Daring Adventures’ Tryout Sled Hockey clinics,” Crane said.

“Our team has really gelled,” Forward Guido Schmid added. “We’ve gotten to know each other and we have great chemistry. And the competition is absolutely getting better.”

The Coyotes play in the Pacific Sled Hockey league with the Los Angeles Kings, San Diego Ducks and Colorado Warriors. Each team hosts a weekend series of games spread out during the season.

In addition, the Coyotes have competed in the Sled Classic in Coral Springs, Fla. in 2015 and in Nashville, Tenn. in 2016; the Disability Festival in San Jose, Calif., in April 2017; and the last two years hosted the USA National Women’s team for exhibition games at the Ice Den.

“Our sponsors do not get enough credit,” Crane said. “Without them, we couldn’t get the ice time we need for practice. We wouldn’t be able to go to the tournaments we go to. We wouldn’t be able to get the equipment we need. And our support staff is so important.”

For the 2017-18 season, Crane said the Coyotes plan on attending the Sled Classic in Minnesota in November, travel to Colorado Springs in January and Los Angeles in February, host the PHSL in March and compete in the Disabled Festival in Chicago in April.

The Phoenix Coyotes sled hockey team is sponsored by Arizona Coyotes Foundation, Paralyzed Veterans of Arizona, Ability360 and Coyotes Alumni.

LivAbility

Ahora en español

PDF disponible para descarga en Línea gratis.

Encuentranos en ability360.org/livability
Oct. 7
“In Search of Fall” Hike
Mogollon Rim
8 a.m. Meet Up at Ability360 S&F Center
info: ability360sports.org
brenna@daring-adventures.org
nickp@ability360.org

Oct. 10
Daring Adventures / Sunset Cycling
5 - 7 p.m.
Rose Mofford Sports Complex,
East Sports Complex
9850 N 23rd Ave, Phoenix AZ
info: signup@daring-adventures.org

Oct. 14
Max in Motion
Power Soccer
Wheelchair Tennis
info:ability360sports.org

Oct. 14
Play Ball – WMF vs. AzSCIA, Adaptive Baseball & Picnic
3:30 - 6 p.m.
Miracle League - 11130 E. Cholla St. #I-110, Scottsdale, AZ 85259
info: mlaz.org

Oct. 21
4th annual Pedal n’ Paddle Fest
Tempe Town Lake Marina
$4 for WMF Survivor Participants
$12 Family, Caregivers & Friends
Free t-shirt and a picnic lunch
info:wmforward.org

Oct. 21
Wheeling in Nature
Dead Horse Ranch State Park, Cottonwood, AZ
12 - 5 p.m.
info: Karen@azspinal.org or 602-507-4209

Nov. 11
9TH Annual Golf Tournament in AZ
7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Whirlwind Golf Club, 5692 W. North Loop Road, Chandler, AZ 85226
info:will2walk.org WhirlWindGolf.com

Nov. 11
Max in Motion
Power Soccer / WC Basketball
Ability360 S&F Center
info:ability360sports.org

Dec. 9
Max in Motion
Power Soccer
Hockey
info:ability360sports.org
COMMUNITY EVENTS

Oct. 6
50th Anniversary Open House Institute for Human Development
5 p.m. – 7 p.m. Disability Heritage Month at Northern Arizona University
912 Riordan Rd., Flagstaff AZ
More info: goo.gl/11Lzky

Oct. 6
BINGO!
6 - 9 p.m.
Ability360 Center
Online Registration
$10 / $15 at the Door
info: azspinal.org/bingo

Oct. 7
Wings for Autism®
5 - 9 p.m.
Designed to alleviate some of the stress that families who have a child with autism experience when traveling by air.
info: at (602) 290-1632 or
jon@arcarizona.org

Nov. 4
Adult Epilepsy Conference
9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Rose Mofford Sports Complex,
info: epilepsyaz.org

Nov. 17
Developmental Disabilities Family Resources Conference
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Black Canyon Conference Center,
9440 N. 5th Ave
Phoenix, 85021
info: arcarizona.org

1st Saturday of Nov.
AZ Ataxia Support Group
1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Ability360 Classroom A
info: Mary Fuchs
(480) 212-6425
mary11115@msn.com

Dec. 3
International Day of People with Disabilities
She just wanted him for the car, Erik teases. Kym disagrees while laughing.

Erik Hightower and Kym Crosby met three years ago at the Olympic training day in Chula Vista, CA. After that brief meeting, they met again in Canada at a competition. Kym didn’t know anyone but Erik so she hung out with him. This is why Erik jokes that Kym spent so much time with him because he was the one with a car. A friendship blossomed and a relationship developed after Kym admitted her feelings for Erik in a late night text in January 2015. They became engaged on May 8, 2017 while at the Olympic training center.

Hightower and Crosby are quite the pair; both professional athletes for the USA Paralympic team. Crosby was born with albinism. She has no pigment in her hair, skin or eyes and she’s legally blind with 20/400 vision. She competed in the Rio de Janeiro games in 2016 and took bronze in the 100 meters. Erik has spina bifida and has been competing in wheelchair racing since the age of 10. He competed in the Paralympics in 2008 in Beijing and in 2016 in Rio.

As athletes, the pair say they’re competitive about everything.

“We can’t go grocery shopping without making bets on who can guess the total price closer or whatever,” Hightower said. “We’ll be betting like, ‘Well if I win, you’ve got to buy the next round of Dutch Bros,’ or something like that.” Crosby agrees.

“Yes, I mean just with everything. We have two bathrooms. We’re like, ‘Who can clean their bathroom faster?’”

This connection between them is evident. They both describe themselves as fun and outgoing and you can tell they enjoy bantering with one another.

Crosby had never dated anyone with a disability before Hightower. She said that she was used to being the only one with a disability before she got into Paralympic sports.

“She is the legs, and I’m the eyes,”

Crosby will get things for Hightower that he can’t reach and he will guide her in locating items.

Their families and friends are supportive of the relationship and are excited as they prepare to get married.

“Just take your time,” Crosby said. “I feel like a lot of couples either rush into stuff or they rush to break things off if they see the first sign of things not working. I would say work it out and just be patient with each other, and I think that that will really help couples in the long run.”

Hightower has similar views.

“Just go with the flow. Don’t try too hard to get into a relationship because usually that’s when it won’t work or when it won’t happen. Just be yourself and just let it happen.”
November is National Family Caregivers’ Month

Thank You Caregivers!

Contact us to receive services or join our team.

ability360.org
Hablamos español!

Home Care Services provides first-rate care. Consumers enjoy knowledgeable, competent assistance. Caregivers receive health coverage, paid vacation and more.

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