LivAbility

Toni Grimes
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Making your home Visitable

Cool Careers
Theresa Devine's got game

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This September marked my 39th year of living with a disability. My 39th year since I was injured in a car accident at age 19.

When I was discharged from rehab in 1980, I found myself sleeping in a hospital bed in my parents’ living room. My future seemed rather bleak. Eventually, they added a spare room to the house with an accessible bathroom and a wheelchair lift. That lift is now nearly 40 years old and still lives in New York.

I didn’t want my life to pass me by. I wanted to be 19 again. I wanted to work again. I moved to Tempe in 1981 to attend Arizona State University, where I got a bachelor’s in justice studies and a master’s in health services administration. By the mid-’80s I was volunteering, interning and advocating. By the late ’80s I was working full-time.

No one expected that to happen. I was expected to go on Social Security condensation and pity. Some of my examples may seem like minor inconveniences, and to some extent, that’s true. I know the accessible bathroom stall will eventually be open. That’s better than none at all, like the old days.

But my standards are higher than, “It’s better than nothing.” That’s why I keep fighting!

We deserve better and we can achieve more change. Vigilant advocacy and public pressure is the vehicle. It made things better for me. And if we keep fighting, it’s going to make things better for the next generation.

Phil Pangrazio
Ability360 President & CEO
Thirteen magazine editions later, we thought we had it figured out. What started as a small newsletter transformed into a glossy magazine brimming with stories—funny, informative and deeply personal, just like us. We expanded into video and grew our reach. We bought better equipment and software to accommodate our demand.

And just when we got comfortable, things changed.

Our content editor, Jennifer Longdon, went and got herself elected to the State House of Representatives in August. Back when we were tossing around the idea of a magazine, we recruited Jen who made it happen. No doubt she’ll use the same approach on the house floor.

Our interim content editor is a former intern, Keerthi Vedantam. We’d love to keep her but she has business in Washington D.C. next year.

We decided to expand into the region, and tell stories of disability throughout the Southwest. We sent our reporter and videographer Kade Garner to New Mexico to capture the beauty of rural life from the disability perspective. You’ll see two of his stories here.

We have also decided to take a closer look at some of our neighbors. Our employee spotlight changed from a Q&A to a moving story, courtesy of Matt Lively. We love learning more about the people who work so closely with the community we strive to cover.

Our artist from accounting, Samantha D’Sa, has provided us with a few illustrations (like our portraits). We’re always on the lookout to incorporate the invisible talents from our colleagues. Be on the lookout for more of her work in this and upcoming editions.

You might notice our design team has given the magazine a facelift too. We work hard on our stories and want to showcase them in their best light, so we felt it was time so we asked our mega-talented graphics team to do some magic. Our hope is that the layouts are clean and simple, yet make you curious.

As one of the few disability magazines in the Southwest, we’ll always strive to be better, innovative and unique. As a result, we’ve decided we’re okay with change.
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.

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### On the Cover

**Toni Grimes:** Veteran and founder of AZ Lupus Warriors

Photo by Loren Worthington
Contributors

**Kade Garner**

@kade_garner

Kade Garner is a Northern Arizona native. When he is not hooked up to an IV filled with diet soda, he is probably filming an event, taking pictures of his dog, or binge-watching a new series. He’s an okay writer.

**Keegan Kelly**

@keegan_kelly

Keegan Kelly is from Rochester, N.Y. and is currently a student at The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. He is studying journalism and political science. Keegan makes videos and writes articles for Ability360. Outside of Ability360, Keegan enjoys music, fashion and being let down by the Buffalo Bills.

**Matt Lively**

@mattblively

Matt Lively studies at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Originally from South Florida, he has lived in the Valley for three years. His first love is sports and he aspires to be a sports broadcaster and storyteller in the future.

**Dena Roché**

@denaroche

Dena Roché is a professional lifestyle journalist whose work appears in magazines like American Way, United Hemispheres, Modern Luxury and more. In her free time you can find her at the gym, on the trail or in a sushi bar enjoying a glass of wine with friends.

**Aitana Yvette Mallari**

@aitanamallari

Aitana Yvette Mallari is an online media journalist who runs on caffeine and WiFi. She’s lived in the Middle East, Asia and both coasts of the U.S. She writes about health, tech and amazing people doing amazing things. She is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications and probably has a deadline to get to.

**Gena Kittner**

Gena Kittner is a freelance writer with more than 20 years of journalism experience. A Midwest transplant, Gena enjoys playing tennis and exploring desert life with her husband and two children.

**Tim Surry**

Tim Surry is a reception specialist at Ability360 Sports & Fitness. Tim is a captain for the 360 Scorpions lacrosse team and coordinates the 360 Golf program. When Tim is not on the greens, or playing lacrosse, he is probably cheering on the Seahawks or rocking out at a concert.

**Chris DiVirgilio**

Christopher has been the web content manager for SPORTS ‘N SPOKES magazine for 10 years, following his passion to meet his audience and tell their stories. He proudly served in the United States Marine Corps as a field radio operator and attended Phoenix College’s journalism program.
Rebeca Cavazos

Rebeca Cavazos is a graphic artist known for her creative designs and her daredevil spirit. You'll find her rock climbing, scuba diving and surfing any weekend she's not playing "mommy-taxi" to Hermosillo or organizing advocacy events. Born in Monterrey, Mexico, Cavazos is a full-time wheelchair user who joined Ability360 in 2015.

Brooke Brown

Brooke Brown loves to tell all types of stories that encourage others. She's the author of "The Little Butterfly Girl", a writer for Autumn Magazine, an actor in Theatre360 and a public speaker. She runs Brooke's Butterfly Touch: Creative Storytelling Services, which strives to help others discover the power in sharing their own stories in order to cultivate hope, opportunities and understanding.

Summer Sorg

@summersworld

Summer Sorg is a student at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication specializing in photography and digital journalism. Her heart lies in storytelling, nature and exploring. Summer plans to use her talents to highlight important issues and inspire people to care.
As the Carolinas start to recover from Hurricane Florence (just two years after Hurricane Matthew) you might look around the desert and appreciate your inland home. It can’t happen here, right? The floods, the downpour, the apocalyptic weather?

Sure, we aren’t prone to hurricanes, tsunamis, or widespread flooding. But we’re prone to power outages, chemical spills, airline crashes and terrorist attacks. And it doesn’t stop at our borders. The Phoenix emergency plan accounts for a huge influx of refugees from California earthquakes.

Please don’t make the potentially grave mistake of thinking you don’t need to pay attention to any of this.

We don’t pay attention to emergency preparedness in Arizona. Take it from a former Federal Emergency Management Agency employee. That’s a big mistake.

Especially for people with disabilities and people with “other access and functional needs,” the phrase used in emergency management. That’s the world I have worked in for the last two years with FEMA.

What if a chemical spill forced a power chair user to evacuate immediately, sans charger? What if a flash flood damaged important medications? What if there’s a shortage of urological or vent supplies?

We learned how to answer those questions the hard way.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, FEMA didn’t know about inaccessible sheltering, handling service animals, Medicaid coverage crossing state lines and handling chair users.

One woman who was quadriplegic was left in her home as floodwaters rose. She and her chair were soon found floating.

Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act the following year which required FEMA to hire a disability integration advisor. They chose Marcie Roth, past executive director of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association, and she built it into the now substantial Office of Disability Integration and Coordination.

The good news is the existence of a very sophisticated emergency management and response system. It’s called “NIMS,” for the National Incident Management System. It’s designed for “all hazards” at any scale and is used to get the response and recovery process up and running following an incident quickly and effectively.

There has since been real progress in understanding and addressing the needs of disaster survivors with disabilities. That includes training local emergency managers and “disability partners” on emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.

The bad news is emergency management systems still aren’t quite sure how to take care of people with disabilities.

Part of the issue is the growing and real commitment of the emergency management world to accessible and functional needs.

And whether or not you have a disability, your part is preparedness. Your life—or someone else’s—may depend on it.

Take a close look at the FEMA, AARP, CDC and Red Cross websites. Make a serious commitment to the recommended measures. Don’t wait for the worst to happen.
“An arrow is only shot forward once you pull it back; you have to go down before you go up.”

Tyler Roland is a pretty positive guy. The 18-year-old Glendale Community College student is in transition. It hasn’t been the easiest year of his life, but it rarely shows.

During his senior year at Greenway High School in Phoenix, Roland sustained his fourth concussion playing basketball. It sidelined him during his senior year.

“I spent in the summer, eight hours a day, everyday, playing basketball,” he said. “My life revolved around basketball, so when it got taken away from me, I felt empty. It changed my whole perception on everything.”

The medical trauma of past concussions coupled with the new one changed how Roland could play. As with most invisible injuries, it was tough for his peers to understand the severity of his pain.

Teresa Roland, Roland’s mother, said that was the toughest part about dealing with the diagnosis.

“Nobody understands what he was going through,” she said. “It killed us, it really did. It still makes me cry.”

Roland’s teammates pushed back, accusing him of overreacting or trying to get attention. But Roland, whose dream was to play ball on senior night, was struggling with his decision to pull out with the severe injury he sustained.

“Senior night was coming up and I was really looking forward to play,” he said. “I would get the questions, ‘Why aren’t you playing? You should be fine.’ No one really knows that there are different levels and different symptoms.”

After his last concussion, Roland pledged he would be a voice for concussion advocacy. Now, he is working with the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona and participating in their Unmasking Project.

The goal of the project is to allow survivors of brain injury tell their stories. The survivors are given a blank mask, a template and art supplies in the mail. They can spend time painting and reflecting on their journeys.

On one side Roland’s mask is a basketball, representing his former life on the court.
other side is a crying face, representing how he felt following his four concussions.

“They’ve been great,” Teresa Roland said. “It helps people tell their story. It helps people to realize what these people go through and how hard it is on them.”

Roland’s ultimate goal is to spread awareness for concussions and head injuries. He’d like to have a month dedicated solely to concussion awareness to amplify the attention it receives.

“Don’t ever get down,” he said. “Life will come up and bite you in the butt, stuff happens. Life has a way of sneaking up on you and you just have to look on the bright side.”

The Unmasking Project will hold viewing parties at Ability360 on November 15 and 29 and on December 13 and 20. ☝️
The AZ Lupus Warriors meet once a month. Sometimes, there are guest speakers and doctors. And the people listening to them are often new faces. A few slick with tears, still red from the sting of a fresh diagnosis. During one of these meetings, a woman began to cry.

It’s not an uncommon sight. Lupus is a systemic autoimmune disease that can affect the joints, skin, brain, kidneys, heart and lungs. Symptoms and complications vary from person to person. But there is one commonality: there is no cure.

If there were, Toni Grimes, would certainly have known. The group’s founder had lupus for the past 12 years, which affects her brain and spinal cord.

But for the crying woman in front of her, all of it was new—the pain, the uncertainty, a schedule drowning in doctors appointments and a carousel of medications.

The woman’s husband turned towards Grimes.

“What do I do?”

Grimes paused, more than a decade of experience on the tip of her tongue.

“Keep doing what you’re doing,” she said. “Loving her.”

This October, Grimes will be inducted into the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame. There are 25 living inductees, including her, and three awards are given posthumously.

I meet her for the first time on the second floor of Ability360’s Sports & Fitness Center, right at the end of her shift. Grimes, a personal trainer, exudes graceful athleticism in her grey uniform. Although she had been awake since the blue of dawn, she looks like she can run a mile at any moment.

To a passerby, she looks perfectly healthy.

But they’d be wrong.

Grimes leads me to the stands of an empty basketball court and takes a seat. When she checks her phone, the rings on her hands catch the light. They’re purple—the color of fibromyalgia, the color of lupus awareness.

“I’m always in pain,” Grimes says. “People don’t really see it—they’re always like, ‘But you look so healthy!’ but they don’t feel what I feel.”

She smiles when she says this. It’s slight and sly: a hint at her own vulnerability.

A sign of strength.

Grimes spent her childhood on soccer fields and running tracks. With her father as a coach and her brother as friendly competition, she thrived as a proud tomboy.

After losing an academic scholarship to the University of Arizona (a result of being “17, young and dumb,” according to Grimes), a counselor called and suggested she join the reserves.

Grimes enlisted as a combat medic two years later.

She returned to UofA, finished basic training, and graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies as well as three minors—sociology, speech and hearing, and health education.

“After all that, they placed me in engineering,” Grimes says. “There weren’t a lot of black female engineers at the time.”

By 2002, she found herself stationed in South Korea as a company commander, floating down the Han river in camouflaged boats. Distanced from other companies and responsible for 250 soldiers, Grimes had to lead her team by herself.

She recalls sending detailed letters home to soldiers’ families about where they were and what they were doing. It wasn’t the most exciting thing, but it helped alleviate their worries.
Grimes soon realized that it meant the world to those back in the States. When Christmas rolled around, she received letters and cookies from grateful moms. One even sent her a music box.

At the same time, there was worry. Grimes was around brilliant engineers with no engineering background herself, and she had been passed over for command due to inexperience.

“I overcompensated,” Grimes says. In addition to leading, she studied engineering for hours a day.

One day, she got a call. Amidst tears of joy, she learned that she had been nominated for the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award. Grimes would later win second place, and her company would go on to win their share of awards.

Then came the diagnosis.

Grimes’ lungs collapsed in 2007. A year later, she had stage three and five kidney disease. She developed fibromyalgia the year after that. Lupus affected her memory and balance. She experienced her worst flare in 2010.

She was medically retired February 2011. Her whole military career spanned 19 years, two months and 29 days.

There was a stretch of time when Grimes was in and out of hospitals. Her mother was by her side, speaking to doctors when Grimes herself was too weak to respond.

“My mom was the best advocate during the worst times,” Grimes said.

Grimes’ boyfriend, Michael Zachery, was also there while she was hospitalized. As she bobbed in and out of consciousness, he slept on the hard, scratchy hospital furniture and kept watch.

Lupus wasn’t unfamiliar to Zachery. His own sister, Phyllis, was diagnosed with lupus when she was a year old. The two were extremely close—almost like twins. She passed away from sickle cell complications in 2012.

He met Grimes in Dallas. She was confident, talkative and slightly aggressive, but also caring.

“I kind of gravitate towards that,” he said. “I wanted to know more.”

Three weeks into their relationship, Grimes was critically hospitalized. That was when Zachery found out she had lupus.

They moved to Arizona, and Zachery became a Le Cordon Bleu trained chef with his own catering business. Grimes dove headfirst into advocacy work, helping others so much that she sometimes forgot herself in the process.

There were times she didn’t eat, didn’t sleep—and Zachery developed an intuition that alerted him when Grimes was reaching her limit.

“The way my sister explained it to me, it was because she didn’t know how much time she had left. She didn’t want to waste a minute of it,” Zachery said. “But being driven like that, you’re going to run out of gas. Pump your breaks. Hold back. Give something back to yourself or you’re going to make your body shut down.”

But in the span of their six-year relationship, he never viewed her condition with gloom. It was just something she dealt with.

He was there to support her when she first started AZ Lupus Warriors, and was in awe of the way she handled everyone’s emotions.

“I’m not good with the emotional stories—that puts weight on me,” Zachery said. “But I don’t think she internalizes it in that matter. She’s a helper. If you’re not getting that support or help, she’ll bring you to the right place.”

For one individual, Grimes’ willingness to help couldn’t go unnoticed.

That’s who nominated Grimes for the AZ Veterans Hall of Fame.

Gabriel ‘Gabe’ Forsberg, who has retired from the Department of Veteran’s Services, has been in charge of helping homeless women veterans since 2009. Grimes approached Forsberg and asked how she could help.

“She didn’t know how, didn’t know [in] what capacity, but she offered herself to me,” Forsberg says. “She’s able to work with women of all levels and really pull those walls down.”

In January 2018 at Maricopa County StandDown, an annual event for donating goods to homeless veterans, a woman from the streets came in. She was aggressive, confused and unwilling to depart from the belongings in her power chair.

“She was H3, and H3 vets are at the risk of death,” Forsberg says. “She was having a psychotic episode,
and the only person who was able to help her out of hundreds was Toni Grimes."

Grimes went up to her and made conversation, the beginning motions of the ebb and flow of trust. Hours later, long after Forsberg went home, Grimes was still working with the woman, eventually getting her cleaned up and in new clothes.

At this point of the interview, Forsberg chokes up and apologizes.

"I’m kind of weeping. I admire her so much. She’s done a lot of work with PTSD, military sexual trauma survivors... she’s just a good, kind person."

When Forsberg’s own friend was diagnosed with lupus, she immediately got her in touch with Grimes.

"Toni has planted a lot of seeds, and all of the people who have seen this incredible kindness has paid it forward; Forsberg says. “She doesn’t think it’s any big deal, but she’s changing lives in every little corner of her world. She’s my hero.”

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**FREE IN-HOME ASSESSMENT**
There is a severe housing shortage for people with disabilities right here in Arizona, but there's also a new movement in the architecture community to combat it.

"Visitability", an architectural philosophy that supports accessible homes, is gathering momentum due to its minimal implementation costs and independent living views. By creating accessible designs in the starting stages, homeowners avoid having to make more costly modifications in the future.

One in four Americans has a permanent disability that affects major life activities, according to the Center for Disease Control. Without choice, limited housing options affect more than just the home. It controls lifestyle, job searches, schooling options and commuting.

It only costs $100 more to implement these features if they're incorporated in the planning stages of building homes.

These 6 features are:

1. A zero-step entrance into the home
2. Doorways that provide at least a 32-inch clearance
3. A half-bath on the main floor
4. Level door handles
5. Reinforced walls that can support grab bars
6. Electrical outlets and environmental controls in reachable locations

Americans move roughly every seven years, which means a single house will be called home by eight or nine families over the lifespan of the dwelling. Chances are, at least one of those families will benefit from accessible features.
TEMPORARY MODS

by Loren Worthington

Ever visited a friend’s home to find you couldn’t get into the bathroom? Or wanted to invite an elderly relative for the holidays, but didn’t know how they’d get through the door?

For architects, engineers and community planners, visitability starts at planning a home. For those of us who already have a home, it means making sure your long-distance family can visit for the holidays without worrying about accessibility issues.

HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS:

1. PORTABLE RAMPs

Your relatives probably don’t want to be carried in and out of your home, especially after a long drive or a stressful plane ride. Portable ramps come in lengths from one inch to 10 inches and can be folded up after use. While not exactly lightweight, one or two people can lay them out.

2. DOORKNOB LEVER ADAPTERS

Doorknobs can be hard to grasp if you have hand limitations. Adding adaptive lever attachments are an easy, temporary modification. They’re so good you may just keep them up.

3. TEMPORARY GRAB BARS

Nobody should have to stress about a relative getting injured while taking a shower. Adding a temporary grab bar adds some safety if a slippery tub causes someone to fall.

4. DOOR HINGE EXTENDER

Sometimes, an extra inch of space can help a wheelchair make it through a doorway. Replacing your hinges with hinge extenders allows doors to open wider and are easy to install. They’re so low maintenance and convenient you could just leave them there all year.
Theresa Devine spent her entire time in college as an artist. But shortly after receiving her MFA in painting in 1994, Devine found a new medium for her art: video games.

“I thought it would get through to people and carry a message better than painting would,” Devine said. “Video games can be downloaded right into your living room.”

She’s been coding since 1995, even spending part of her career coding for a corporate company. Now, over two decades later, Devine teaches the humanities side of gaming rather than the technical side.

“What you do with the medium is more important than how to make it,” she said.

Devine decided she was on a path to be a college professor, but knew, at the time, there was no market in the education sphere for her craft.

“I wanted to teach games as art, but when I started down this path there was no place hiring to teach games at all.”

Early in Devine’s career she received some life changing news.

In 1998, she was diagnosed with a rare immune system disease called scleroderma, which affects connective tissue.

“When I was diagnosed 20 years ago, they told me there was no cure; there was no treatment. They said, ‘Someday you’re going to get sick, it’s going to progress, and you’re going to die.’”

The scleroderma started kicking in around 2008, right around the same time as the economic crash. Devine lost her programming job in Chicago and, like millions of Americans, was out of work.
Her pre-existing condition forced her to wait three years for treatment. The scleroderma progressed and, in 2011, she needed a wheelchair.

Between the time of her diagnosis and 2011, new treatments for scleroderma were developed. Devine is currently benefiting from a new treatment that prevents her scleroderma from progressing, but knows things could have been different.

“If the system was different or if the economy hadn’t crashed, it is possible that I would still be walking around,” she said.

These tough times amplified Devine’s desired message of understanding she had wanted to portray since entering into the gaming world. Living with a disability lead to a deeper understanding of discrimination.

“Before, the discrimination I experienced was the discrimination every woman faces, that I have to be five times better at my job to be considered half as good,” Devine said. “Multiply that be about a hundred and that’s the experience of discrimination with a person as a disability.”

Devine was making another transition—she parted ways with her fiancé, and her 23-year-old daughter was ready to move out.

“I didn’t want to hold her back.” Devine said. “I was figuring things out as I go and I didn’t wasn’t trying to have to lean on anybody.”

Devine admitted these were dark times and went through a grieving period, but sticking to her goal of becoming a college professor helped her battle through.

“I had this goal that I kept working toward. It gave me something else to focus on. As I worked through the acceptance of what was happening to my body, the grief lifted and the joy came back.”

Devine got rid of all the furniture in her house as she prepared to move out. She partook in a nationwide search for a college professor job and landed one at Arizona State University.

Along with teaching, Devine is still creating art through games. She said as much as she loves teaching about games, she is always learning from them as well.

During her creative process, she is always learning new things about life, as well as about games.

One of Devine’s games is titled “Unseen.” It features a protagonist who is invisible and trying to get a crowd of butterflies moving on stage.

“It’s about trying to control something you can’t see,” she said.

While Devine was programming the character’s movement, she made her own discovery.

“I programmed two things, velocity and direction. If you have velocity and no direction, you just spin. If you have direction and no velocity, you’re just standing and not pointing anywhere,” Devine said.

“I see that as a metaphor for life, you need to have your speed and your direction so you can actually go somewhere.”

One of Devine’s games is titled “Unseen.” It features a protagonist who is invisible and trying to get a crowd of butterflies moving on stage.
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Deep within the evergreen forests and between mountains that billow into the clouds, lies a canyon where one can walk, or even wheel, on water. Narrow highways wind through meadows still kissed with summer’s glow and around enormous trees that are just beginning to glimmer with fall’s gold tones. Through your vehicle’s windows you will spot cattle, horses, sheep and even deer as you make your way to an awe-inspiring location.
Welcome to the Land of Enchantment.

This is the Catwalk Recreation Area in New Mexico. This trail is just five miles outside of Glenwood, New Mexico and offers hiking and scenic views for visitors of all abilities.

The Gold Rush of the 1800s shaped many small towns in the Western United States, including this trail. In 1893, gold and silver were discovered in the Whitewater Canyon. Some hardware from the mining one hundred years ago in this small canyon still clings to the faces of the canyon walls and is noticeable from the trail. It creates a subtle unification between the natural beauty of the area and the rustic charm of the time-worn equipment.

At the start of the trail is a self-pay box near the welcome sign. The fee is a small three dollars per vehicle. Your senses become overwhelmed with the smell of pine trees, the sound of trickling water and the sight of bright yellow wildflowers sprinkled among the varying grasses, shrubs and trees. Accessible parking, bathrooms and a picnic area are the first treats the park offers its visitors, but the real magic of the park is the trail.

The first half mile is paved and gracefully follows the small river as it hugs the Rocky Mountain, making it easy for wheelchair users to maneuver. Near the end of this part of the trail you'll get a glimpse of a small but sturdy bridge that can hold even heavy powerchairs. It sits perfectly over the river and between trees that create a perfect canopy above the water, giving you a glimpse of what the upcoming catwalks have to offer. The bridge is wide and made of metal. It's solid frame is emblematic of the thoughtful safety features throughout the catwalks.

After the bridge, there is a stretch of paved path that is quite steep. Uphill stretches of steep-grade trail are signs that hikers are getting close to their ultimate destination: the catwalks.

Grant Winters is a young man who uses a manual wheelchair. He and his thirteen-year-old brother CJ visited the park with us. Winters was able to propel himself up this steep grade, but for those who may not be in as good shape as a 20-year-old, it would be a good idea to bring a friend, or to use a powerchair.

Here, it is evident that mining once took place here. The rock walls that tower over hikers are scarred by the tools that once cut them. Here, nature's beauty meets man's ingenuity to create an atmosphere truly unlike any other.

The steep hill gives way to a majestic view overlooking the river below and also to the mountain peaks rising above canyon walls. This is where visitors also get their first glimpse of the catwalks. Metal turned rust-red with time rests along the sides of the canyon walls like a wasp nest on the side of a house. Handrails offer added stability to hikers who may need it, while
metal resembling reinforced chicken wire allows visitors to look straight below where hikers can walk, or wheel, above water.

The canyon walls slowly lean toward one another and the catwalks move forward like snakes in the grass. Visitors become small as the canyon grows around them. This is the climax of the trail and like any good movie, the climax gives way to the end. The catwalks end as the canyon gives way to open river.

For more adventurous hikers, the trail does continue, but signs warn that the trail is not maintained, and it's not accessible after that point.

We met back up with Winters at the end of the trail and asked him about his experience. He suggested to bring gloves (he forgot his) and said it is a good idea for manual chair users to bring a free wheel for a less bumpy experience.

All in all, the Catwalk Recreation Area makes for a great day trip. The trail and facilities are accessible and the vistas are incredibly beautiful. Looking for more than just a pretty hike? There is a ghost town about 10 miles from the park and the drive to the trail is gorgeous with many places to pull over to take pictures or camp.
SEEING MIRACLES

By Matt Lively

Employee Spotlight

Michael Stewart has seen miracles.

"Don't ask me how, but I've watched people walk who have never walked," he said.

Stewart is a lifeguard at Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center, and he watches over the therapy pool a mere yards away from his lifeguard chair. Stewart has been around for more than three years. He came to 360 for recreational physical therapy and never left. "I've watched people walk after accidents," he said. "With therapy and the right conditions here, it is a great place."

Stewart served in the United States Marines from 1976 to 1980. The VA recommended Ability360 to him as a way to get out of the house. He went from being a member, to a volunteer, to an employee.

"I loved it," he said. "Once you come here, you feel like you are part of being normal. Everyone here is nice. You're accepted to be here."

Stewart has followed the path of a few other employees. Gus Lazear, the vice president and general manager of the Sports & Fitness Center, makes it a point to hire volunteers.

"Starting as member and becoming staff is a great transition," he said. "The ownership and passion they have for the department is beyond evident. They also have firsthand knowledge before their first day and also have great ideas for continuous improvement."

By offering a discounted rate for their gym, Ability360 has been able to keep veterans involved in many sports and recreation activities.

"If every disabled vet could come here, they need to come here," he said. "Once you're here, you'll always come back. It's one of the nicest facilities I've ever been to."

At the end of the day, Stewart has ultimately stuck around Ability360 because of the people. Between the miracles he has watched with his own two eyes and the daily conversation he gets to have with his new and regular swimmers, it's all worth it for him.
Impossible is vastly overestimated.

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azcompletehealth.com
REGULAR TEEN, PARALYMPIC HOPEFUL
STEPHEN HERNANDEZ
by Matt Lively

Stephen Hernandez has never shied away from sports.

Not in second grade, when he forcefully punted a kickball with his prosthetic leg and sent it flying. Not when he saw a flier for three-on-three amputee basketball at the doctors’ office. And not now, with two colleges recruiting him for their wheelchair basketball programs.

At 17, Hernandez is living the high school athlete’s dream: excelling at sports and given an opportunity to play at the collegiate level.

“[The doctors] described it as him walking on basketballs with fins,” his mother, Gina Hernandez, said.

More than a decade later, after a slew of clinical studies, appointments with specialists and numerous unsure diagnoses, the Hernandez family isn’t quite sure what to call Stephen Hernandez’s condition. Of all the words thrown around—cancer, genes, overgrowth—the last one stands out the most. One leg is thicker, one arm is longer, and one finger is bigger.

“It’s the bad finger,” his mother said, indicating the middle finger.

For the most part, his classmates and peers have been supportive of him. However, it wasn’t always easy during school.

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“When I was in middle school, I was the only kid in school with a disability,” he said. “No one took it easy on me and kids were harsh. Sometimes they’d jack my leg when I’d switch shoes. It was pretty hard growing up in middle school.”

His support system has been his family, and he credits his parents for telling him not to give up.

“After that, I want to go to the Paralympics in 2020.”

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For the most part, his classmates and peers have been supportive of him. However, it wasn’t always easy during school.
Reed, head coach of the wheelchair youth team, knows Hernandez has talent.

“I think the sky is the limit for him,” Reed said. “Stephen’s been playing three years now. He’s a great leader. He can create opportunities for himself if he keeps working as hard as he has been.”

Hernandez admits that he didn’t start watching Paralympic sports until he started coming to Ability360, but that won’t slow down his dream of actually participating in one. For him, basketball is his future.

“I’ve practiced with the team [UofA] once and played against the team a couple times,” he said. “They’re a really good team. I can’t wait to hopefully play for them.”
A young man with light brown hair and broad shoulders makes his way over to the enclosure, opens the door and leans out of his wheelchair to snatch the red hen flapping its wings.

The hen looks like a red mother hen that can be found in a number of children’s books. Nothing about its appearance is particularly frightening, but anyone who has ever been around poultry knows that looks can often be deceiving.

Country life isn’t for everyone, but Grant Winters is proof that country life can be for anyone who chooses it.

“I can’t ride my dirt bike anymore,” Winters said through a smile that gave a peek into his sarcastic sense of humor. Winters is 20 years old and grew up in the small town of St. Johns, Arizona. Weeks before graduating high school, he got in a dirt bike accident that caused swelling in his spinal cord and lead to paralysis.

Winters and his family live in a home perched on a hill overlooking their small community. The house was made accessible for Winters, but the surrounding area was made accessible by him. As the sun goes down, the sky is filled with pastel pinks, purples and blues, while the surrounding hillside seems to glow with shades of green and red from the clay earth—a Bob Ross painting right outside his window.

Before his accident, Winters raised chickens. It’s a demanding physical job; building and maintaining pens, racing after the occasional runaway, bending down to pick up large bags of feed and jumping out of the way of the occasional angry goose are just some of the daily tasks.

The accident hasn’t changed that. Unlike most people in the area, Winters doesn’t just raise chickens for their eggs, but also for their plumage. Behind his house are birds of all feathers: run-of-the-mill farm hens that lay eggs, geese, a handful of guinea hens, a pair of peacocks and even some show chickens.

The show chickens stick out of the crowd with their smaller bodies and dark, glossy feathers. They are bred solely to be admired. The bantam chickens are pitch black with the exception of some fire-red feathers that peek out like flames clinging onto coals, giving the birds a beautifully striking variation in their color.

For Winters, there was no way he’d give up taking care of the birds.

“It took us a couple days. We were pretty motivated,” Winters said as he looked at the enormous two-story pen he and his younger brothers built for the guinea hens just a few weeks ago.

Winters is the oldest sibling teaching the younger ones how to take care of the different birds. They often move the hose from pen to pen, watering the chickens, which is one of the few tasks Winters has trouble doing. That sibling teamwork led to their first peacock.

A neighbor’s peacock got loose, and the neighbor went on social media and said whoever wanted it just needed to catch it.

“So, we went for it,” Winters said.

After rolling through fields, hopping over fences and chasing a bird that was a master of escape, the boys caught the peacock. One of Winters’ brothers said that of all the birds they have, the peacock is now his favorite.

Winters’ family has adapted to using a wheelchair in a rural community. He says everything that needs to be accessible is, and anything that isn’t... well, he and his family find a way to make it work. But in the next few months, he plans to leave the nest, move out on his own, and go back to school. He is thinking about studying engineering. It will be a perfect fit as he is already a certified welder.

The country life isn’t for everyone. But for Grant Winters, it’s the best life there is.
The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum easily is one of my family’s favorite places in Tucson. The 98-acre museum is part zoo, part botanical garden, part art gallery and part aquarium. It attracts nearly 400,000 visitors a year and is a perennial favorite on many “best of” lists when it comes to Tucson attractions.

The drive alone to reach the museum is worth the trip, offering spectacular views of saguaro cacti that blanket the mountains.

In early September, I toured the museum with Josh Wheeler, 38, and his family of three to experience what a visit to the Desert Museum is like for someone in a wheelchair. Wheeler enjoys being outside, especially working in his yard, and has traveled throughout the United States and the world. He’d been to the Desert Museum once, several years ago.

The day we visited, it was a mild 84 degrees. While there are shady spots and several indoor exhibits, about 85 percent of the museum is outdoors, so come prepared. That means water bottles, hats and sunscreen.

Wheeler, a member of both the USA Wheelchair Rugby and University of Arizona Wheelchair Rugby teams, used a manual wheelchair for our tour and felt it did well. However, others might want to consider an electric wheelchair when visiting the museum depending on their personal strength, how long they plan to stay and how warm the weather is.

The museum itself maintains a small fleet of manual wheelchairs and a limited number of ECVs, which are available for rent at the front ticket window on a first-
come, first-served basis, according to its website.

Upon meeting at the museum, Wheeler assured me there were plenty of handicapped parking spaces, some specifically made wider and labeled for vans.

Stops during our tour included the Cave of Minerals, a mountain lion, a black bear and a bobcat. 230 animal species and 1,200 types of plants span the 21 acres of various desert habitats.

Visibility can be a challenge for people in wheelchairs while visiting places like zoos or museums. Bars and fences around exhibits are high for safety, but this makes it hard for someone to see over them if sitting down.

For the mountain lion and black bear exhibits, vertical metal poles of varying heights create a fence that you can peer over and look through.

The Desert Museum estimates that 96 percent of its exhibits are viewable by wheelchair, according to its website.

Wheeler did have to perform a few "stretching arches" in his chair, lifting himself up to see an exhibit, but said overall the visibility was very good.

The paths throughout the museum are often unpaved with hard-packed "$\text{"PRETTY SMOOTH, REALLY, }\text{" HE SAID. }\text{"IT’S NOT HARD TO MANEUVER SAFELY.\text{"}"}
sand, dirt and rocks. There are paved surfaces too, which the museum acknowledges on their website.

Wheeler described the paths throughout the museum as, “not perfect, but definitely doable."

“Pretty smooth, really,” he said. “It’s not hard to maneuver safely.”

Wheeler’s wife Stephanie noted the paths throughout the museum were wide enough to accommodate two passing wheelchairs, which happened several times during our visit.

Gloves here are a must if using a manual wheelchair as the wheel rims get too hot to touch in the sun.

Paths throughout the Desert Museum grounds occasionally have inclines. Loren Worthington, who accompanied us in an electric wheelchair, noted, “If you don’t have a lot of function, you are going to need some help.”

Two exhibits at the museum have underground viewing: the Cat Canyon and the Riparian Corridor. The latter includes the river otter. The ramp entrance for Cat Canyon was clearly marked, but it took more searching for the Riparian Corridor ramp to see the fish and river otter. Better signage in these areas would be appreciated, Wheeler said.

After about two hours our crew was ready to go.

“Any hotter than this and it would start to be not fun,” Wheeler said.

Overall, Wheeler said his tour through the Desert Museum was very enjoyable. Exhibits were accessible and navigating the paths throughout the grounds, while a little taxing at times, went smoothly. It’s important to come prepared for the outdoor elements, but this unique outdoor space is what sets the Desert Museum apart from so many other attractions. ☺
Jennifer Conway recalled the bright smile of little Esmerelda as the girl got comfortable sitting in her very first chair. The mother cried tears of joy.

Conway was with them on behalf of a disability ministry, Joni and Friends Arizona. She was in Mexico to capture video and photos of the experience on behalf of Highlands Church in Scottsdale, which partnered with Joni and Friends to send a team to Rocky Point, Mexico to deliver 50 manual wheelchairs in June.

In four days, they fitted 25 chairs for 25 people.

"There's a lot more stigma about people with disabilities in other countries, so we wanted to make sure they knew they're loved," Conway said.

Joni and Friends Arizona is celebrating its 25th anniversary of service throughout the state by expanding their reach past Arizona’s borders.

The Wheels for the World Ministry, started by Joni Eareckson Tada, is meant to "bring the gift of mobility and the Gospel message to people with disabilities worldwide," according to the website.

"On our last couple of mission trips to Mexico, we were doing vision care, but we noticed the needs of the people with disabilities and wanted to meet them," said Missy Farrington, the Special Needs Ministry director at Highlands Church.

The team for the Rocky Point trip consisted of the Joni and Friends Cause 4 Life interns who work at Highlands Church, some Highlands Church families, and several physical therapists, occupational therapists and mechanics.

"It's important to have the therapists and mechanics on your team so that you can be sure each person who receives a chair is comfortable and seated properly," continued Farrington.

Each person receiving a chair was called back to the therapy room to be fitted individually.
“The interns helped cut and cover pieces of foam, which especially allowed the younger kids to be able to grow into bigger chairs, so they will last longer.”

The other chairs were left for the church to distribute as needed.

The rest of the team spent time praying for the specific needs of the other families while they waited to be fitted.

“We really wanted to meet their spiritual needs as well as their physical ones,” Farrington also said. To do that, the team also served all the families a fancy dinner.

The chairs serve another population: inmates at Kingman Prison, who refurbished them.

“It’s neat because each chair is assigned to an inmate who follows it through the whole process, and they get to sign their name on it at the end,” added Farrington. Joni and Friends partners with several prisons throughout the country in this way.

Back in Mexico, it was a special moment for Farrington to watch Israel, the pastor’s son, get settled into his first chair after spending years being carried around, over his father’s shoulder.

“He could finally see what was going on around him, greet people, and become part of the community,” she said. “It was a blessing to see.”

For more information on future Wheels for the World trips, visit joninandfriends.org or highlandschurch.org/serve.
I gave Josh Myer a jersey. Number 15. With an emotional voice, he told me this:

"Thank you, I’ve never had a jersey before and I’m going to wear this with pride and respect."

The Ability360 lacrosse team, the Scorpions, knew it had some hard work to put in while preparing for the 2018 Wheelchair Lacrosse National Championships in Denver this August.

Spoiler alert: We lost. But moments like the one with Josh are what stood out to me the most.

We practiced every Sunday, starting the last week of April. The coaches ran us through pass and catch, and the quickest and toughest man won. We did shooting drills with me in goal and I felt like I had 100,000 shots taken on me.

As the tournament drew near, I could see us coming together as a team. We started running designed plays and each player was coming together as one with their passes, catches and just knowing where their teammate would be on the court.

Even though we got whipped, I felt it was an awesome experience for everybody to be on a competitive team and to learn what it means to be a teammate.

Our final game went into sudden-death double overtime, where the first team to score won. Everybody was exhausted but still gave it their all. That game was probably one of the most exciting games I’ve ever been a part of.

The stands filled with spectators to watch us battle. Sure, we ended up losing, but our coaches had a stern yet powerful teaching conversation with us afterward. You have to lose to win, and I felt we all won something!

Our team captain, Jason Graber, took away an important lesson from Nationals.

"Having the opportunity to go to Denver for Nationals this year was an awesome learning experience and great for the team," he said. "We had a chance to play against some well-developed programs and we learned a lot. The one thing that I took away from Nationals is that we’re doing everything right. We need to just stick with it and continue to practice in order to grow as a team. We need to get stronger, faster and get more people interested in the game."

We learned a lot this season as individuals and as teammates. I know we are eager and ready to get back out there. The Ability360 Scorpions are ready for that next sudden-death shootout game or whatever comes our way!
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HAVE YOU HEARD OF PVA?

For more than 70 years, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has been advocating for the rights and benefits of veterans with spinal cord injuries and disease. Since its inception, PVA has grown beyond the veterans they serve.

Paralyzed Veterans of America
Arizona Chapter

Leonard Smith is a Navy veteran and is AZPVA's president. "We advocate to our elected officials for 'common sense' accommodations and legislation," he said.

PVA has individuals who take on the heavy lifting associated with VA benefit paperwork, called national service officers, who help veterans with their claims. Those claims consist of finances, medical or durable medical equipment.

But helping file VA benefits is only a part of the PVA mission. People can always see PVA in action at various veterans organization events throughout the calendar year. Many of the chapter members are on committees within their community, while others keep active by participating in outreach programs at elementary and high schools.

One of AZPVA's more popular programs is the Loan Closet where medical equipment, from power wheelchairs to shower chairs, is donated to the chapter then loaned out to veterans in need.

"The Loan Closet is fast becoming one of our better programs," Smith said. "We have locations in Phoenix, Mesa, and will soon to start one in South Phoenix. Not only does PVA provide durable medical equipment to our veterans but they also provide medical equipment to the community at large."

One particular outreach is at the Maricopa County Stand Down, held annually in January at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum. The Maricopa County Stand Down is a program of the Arizona Housing Coalition which holds annual events and resource fairs.

PVA staffs tables at the Stand Down and other local health fairs where they're available to answer questions about the VA and PVA's mission.

The Arizona chapter, known as AZPVA, helps local veterans obtain their eligibility at the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC). They're educated about durable medical equipment, legality regarding ADA issues and often get their first taste of adaptive sports through the VA's recreational therapy programs.

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2018 DUEL in the DESERT
ABILITY360 SPORTS & FITNESS CENTER

Scan this code for registration information and sponsorship opportunities
“Mobilize: Resistance through action” was the perfect slogan for the 2018 annual conference of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) held as every year in Washington D.C.

People from CILs and SILCs around the country attended the largest event dedicated to advocating for the civil rights of people with disabilities.

Rebecca Vallas, the vice president for the Poverty to Prosperity program at Center for American Progress (CAP), addressed a very energetic crowd, encouraging the attendants to collaborate and act to demand their civil and human rights.

The pouring rain wasn’t enough to deter the energy of the biggest crowd NICL had in years.

Once at the U.S. Capitol, participants had the opportunity to listen to congresspeople who have shown their support to people with disabilities. They talked about issues that affect health care, ADA, DIA and employment rights among other important topics. Three members pledged to co-sponsor DIA.

Officials that took the mic during the rally included Senator Tammy Duckworth (I.L.), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (C.A.) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (N.Y.).

NCIL honored the hard work of advocates during the Awards Banquet at the national and regional levels.

NICL was a fantastic way to showcase the diverse voices from around America all united to fight for disability rights.

7 TIPS TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TRAVEL TO NCIL

Going to NCIL is the dream for anyone involved in advocacy for people with disabilities. If you want to get the most out of your experience, you need to plan ahead. Here’s our list of suggestions.

1. **Save money:** Once you learn the date of the event, start researching flight and hotel prices to budget your travel. Consult the NCIL website to learn about scholarships they provide to attend the conference.

2. **Fly smart:** Wear comfy clothes and shoes. Load up your devices, and bring an extra power charger if possible. Earplugs, a pillow and a blanket may also be needed.

3. **Read about the conference:** At the beginning of the year, NCIL publishes materials for the upcoming conference. Learning in advance will help you reduce anxiety.

4. **Check in early:** Avoid long lines that can make you show up to the sessions late.

5. **Schedule sessions:** We definitely want to learn about as many topics as we can, but many interesting sessions happen at the same time. Choose wisely.

6. **Connect:** Don’t be afraid to thank panelists and experts. Take the time to talk a little more about their presentations, either during, after or by follow-up email.

7. **Get ready for the march:** A backpack will be the savior of saving your day. Pack it up with sunscreen, an umbrella, snacks and water. Bring some wipes to freshen up before you go to talk to the senators.
Nicole Abbott, a certified public accountant, and Aaron, a high school teacher, held all the dreams any expectant parents have.

For Aaron, it was giving their two-year-old son Lincoln a sibling to play with. For Nicole it was imagining what university their unborn child would go to.

But a few days after giving birth to Jude on May 7, 2016, those dreams came crashing down. The doctors told Nicole there was a 30 to 40 percent chance Jude had Mosaic Down syndrome, despite the fact that prenatal tests showed no sign indicating Down syndrome.

"I remember being so pissed," said Nicole. "Why would [the doctor] say all those crazy things when he obviously was just a few weeks early?"

But those crazy things turned out to be reality.

"I still feel an overwhelming amount of guilt regarding my feelings when we found out about Jude’s diagnosis," said Aaron. "We had just had another child, had given Lincoln a sibling. I should have been overjoyed."

Instead, it was one of the darkest moments of my life.”

"ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS FOR ME IS TO NOT COMPARE JUDE’S DEVELOPMENT"

As any parent of a child with special needs knows, those feelings are normal.

"I wish we could say we handled it well, but we didn’t,” said Nicole. “We both walked out [to] the hospital hall, and when we were finally alone, we held each other and sobbed. We just felt so blindsided and so lost.”

Nicole struggled for a month before her doctor prescribed Zoloft to help her.

With the support of family, friends and their neighbors in Coronado who rallied around them, Nicole and Aaron adjusted to their new reality.

They found parenting groups and Gigi’s Playhouse, a national organization that connects families whose children have Down syndrome.

“We also lucked out because the same week that Jude was born, local author, Amy Silverman, published, 'My Heart Can't Even Believe It’, a memoir about her daughter Sophie who has Down syndrome. We instantly connected and since then she’s been our 'person' that we always turn to,” Nicole said.

The couple slowly learned to adjust to their new reality, partly drawing on Aaron’s background working with individuals living with developmental disorders back in 2000.
“It’s amazing how life sometimes prepares you for new realities,” he said.

Since Jude came into their lives, the Abbotts’ perceptions about parenting have shifted in many expected and unexpected ways.

“One of the most difficult things for me is to not compare Jude’s development to where Lincoln was at his age,” said Aaron. “My focus as a parent has been transformed to promote kindness and acceptance of differences and diversity above all else.”

Being a parent of any child is hard due to the uncertainty and challenges. Having Jude has also caused the Abbotts to turn to each other more than ever.

“When you have a two-year-old who can’t walk, talk, and likes to hit his head into the ground when he can’t communicate, it’s a challenge,” said Nicole. “We’ve learned how to support and balance out the other parent if one of us is melting down. While we love getting away on dates, we also both take individual nights off, so Aaron can hike, and I can go sit at our local neighborhood bar with a book and a beer.”

While parenting can be difficult, both Jude and the family are thriving.

“Jude loves to play with his brother Lincoln, and absolutely thrives in his daycare that has him among his peers. We are so lucky to have found such a good community for him,” said Nicole.

For other couples that become parents of a child with special needs, Nicole offers this advice: “Find your tribe. Some people find large support groups. For us, it has been a few other Down parents that we feel connected to, and friends who aren’t in our situation who can support us when we need it.”

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