Cool Careers
Bike Fabricator/Angler
Jake O'Connor

Autonomous Cars
Meet Accessible Olli

Lost Dutchman
Accessible cabins & adventure

Food Therapy
Steve Norton in the kitchen

California Wildfires
Do you have a plan?

INDEPENDENT & ACTIVE IN THE SOUTHWEST
Edition 15 | Winter 2019

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You can’t always win. And if you do, you probably aren’t pushing hard enough. We started advocating for a light rail stop about a year after the Sports & Fitness Center opened in October of 2011. We knew it would make a difference. We knew it was important to our consumers. We were often discouraged and told it would be nearly impossible. We didn’t give up.

Now, seven years later and a whole lot more advocating, I am excited to announce that the new light rail station located at 50th Street and Washington just west of the Ability360 Center is planned to open in mid-March. Valley Metro is working on a grand opening celebration that we’ll soon share once we know the date and details.

The opening of this additional station is a monumental achievement for all the advocates who voiced their support for its construction. Without their efforts, this would not have happened. We proved that advocacy can move mountains and create incredible change anywhere!

The new station is fabulous news for thousands of people with disabilities who have waited 10 years for easier access to the Ability360 Center. Public transit and light rail users from all across the 26-mile system from east Mesa to north Phoenix will now have the stop they’ve longed to use.

We have many people to thank, especially the citizens of Phoenix who supported the transit tax extension, but also former Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton and the entire City Council who ensured it got built with the new transit tax funding.

I’d also like to give a special shout-out to the late Congressman Ed Pastor who voiced his support for moving the station as close to the Ability360 Center as possible. Thank you, Ed. Every voice made a difference!

Finally, as we look forward to 2019 and beyond, I hope everyone will advocate for a worthy cause, an unmet need or a solution that will make everyone’s future better. Determined advocacy can make it happen.

If Ability360 is not the closest Center for Independent Living (CIL) to you, reach out and get involved with one near you. You’ll likely find that you aren’t the only one in need of a change in the law, improved accessibility, or heck, maybe even the next bus/light rail stop.
DOES ANYONE EVEN READ A MAGAZINE ANYMORE?

It’s certainly a question we on this side ponder every quarter as we create each edition. As tough as it is, it all seems worth it when we collect great stories that speak to the disability community. While not every story is meant for everyone, we strive to find unique stories that speak to our diversity.

I recall early on when we pitched the idea of a magazine to the boss (Phil Pangrazio). He asked if there were even enough stories out there to keep a magazine alive. Seemingly so. In the past fourteen editions, we have put together hundreds of stories about the people, places and things that make up our community.

Edition 15 is no different. In a first for the magazine, the cover story takes us out of Arizona. As Kirk Williams explains, Jake O’Connor may have one of the coolest careers we’ve discovered.

As we expand both geographically and in topic, at least one of our stories is sure to grab your attention. A few standout articles include our relationship story by Stephanie Amaya that changes things up a bit (for the better); Kade Garner introduces you to our all-new section on food; Keegan Kelly writes about a local autonomous vehicle that you probably didn’t even know existed; in what is perhaps the most serious story we have ever told, Gary Karp gives us a sobering look at the sheer hell those in California have endured with the recent wildfires.

Finally, we can announce that LivAbility has a new editor. Not surprisingly, she hails from Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. Kasey Kaler is joining us as we put the final touches on this edition of LivAbility. Longtime readers may recall Kasey has contributed a few stories in prior years. As we met with all the candidates, what struck us about Kasey was the opportunity to add a person with obvious talent who could bring a youthful and thoughtful spirit to the team. Once she gets the hang of everything we do, we know she’ll be cooking up a great magazine for the next 15 editions – and beyond.
Welcome to the newest edition of LivAbility
LivAbility is a quarterly lifestyle magazine for people with disabilities. Each edition contains articles that promote an active, fulfilling lifestyle for every ability.

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Photo by Meredith O’Connor
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Contributors

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My name is Steph Amaya, I'm an Arizona native of Central American descent. I'm a non-binary person using the pronouns they/them. I'm currently a student at Arizona State University studying journalism with a focus in videography.

**Alison Baionno**
Born and raised in Philadelphia, PA, 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.

**Kade Garner**
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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.

**Christian Guerithault**
Christian Guerithault is an alumnus of Barrett, The Honors College at ASU. He majored in Sports and Media Studies through ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business. Christian is a Phoenix native and has two older brothers. He is the biggest sports fanatic you'll ever meet and hopes to one day work in the front office of a professional sports team.

**Gary Karp**
Gary Karp, a wheelchair user since his SCI in 1973, became a speaker for disability after releasing his first book "Life On Wheels: For the Active Wheelchair User" in 1999.

**Keegan Kelly**
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Keegan Kelly is from Rochester, NY and is currently a student at The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University 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**
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Matt Lively is a senior 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 aspires to be a sports broadcaster and storyteller in the future.

**Steve Norton**
A native of Santa Ana, CA, Steve Norton has been in the hospitality industry for the past 30 years. He attended New York's prestigious Culinary Institute of America and has worked as a private chef. Norton loves to share his knowledge and expertise in healthy eating, including menu planning, managing a food budget, and cooking with fresh ingredients.
Keerthi Vedantam

Keerthi Vedantam is a Silicon Valley native studying journalism and graphic design at Arizona State University. She’s always on the lookout for good stories and innovative ways to tell them. Outside of Ability360, she produces podcasts and takes pictures. Keerthi lives on a steady diet of hot sauce and podcasts, and she wouldn’t want it any other way.

Kirk Williams

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Kirk Williams is a quadriplegic adventure photographer and blogger who refuses to sit still. From Rugby to world travel, Kirk has tried it all. His most recent discovery is a love for Overlanding, where he is embarking on a trip to South America in 2019 in his custom outfitted 4x4 Campervan.
Farm Fresh & within reach

Steve Norton Explores Downtown Phoenix’s Open Air Market

by Kade Garner
The morning is as crisp as the fruits and vegetables piled on crates and boxes at the vendors’ stands. Yellow, purple, red and green produce fill a normally grey and unpaved parking lot. The air is thick with the sounds of vendors explaining their new products, the sizzling of cooking food, and the scent of fresh bread, coffee and organic soaps.

This is the Open Air Market in Downtown Phoenix.

Arizona isn’t just a desert, it’s a food desert. The State Department of Economic Security found one-in-six Arizonans are affected by food insecurity, and Arizona has prioritized food access workshops through agriculture and economics.

Outsiders of the Southwest desert conjure up images of dusty plains with sparse greenery, but locally-owned and ethically-sourced produce isn’t hard to find at the Open Air Market every Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This is one of many ways the state is combatting lack of access to food.

The nonprofit market allows vendors, some of whom are starting businesses and don’t yet have a storefront, to come together and sell their products to the public while growing their consumer base. The market also allows consumers to meet the people who are growing the produce they eat and even take classes to learn more about nutrition and how to cook. It has also become a place for self-proclaimed foodies to hang out, eat, shop and share ideas.

Steve Norton is one local foodie who decided to see what the market has to offer. Norton was a chef before he had a
Norton no longer works as a chef, but still lives to cook. Fresh, in-season ingredients make for the best dishes, according to his ethos. The Open Air Market is a place where Norton can find homegrown produce for any of the seasonal comfort foods he is thinking about whipping up. However, farmers’ markets are often crowded and seldom accessible. Norton wanted to put this one to the test.

Just off Central Avenue, the Open Air Market is easy to get to. The light rail has two stops within three blocks of the market. However, ADA parking is often hard to find. The free parking that is open just for the market does have a few spots for accessible vehicles, but the dirt lot is unpaved and may be difficult for those using manual chairs to navigate the rocky ground.

The market takes place in the Phoenix Public Market Café's paved parking lot. This means it is very wheelchair-friendly. The café has accessible bathrooms, which are opened for the public to use while shopping at the farmers’ market. Due to the loud sounds and colors, the ambiance is a sensory experience—or an overload. Thankfully, there are spaces on the perimeter of the market one can sit if the experience becomes overwhelming. The market is also very crowded. Nonetheless, the paths are wide and most shoppers will happily make room for a wheelchair to pass.

Norton made his way from vendor to vendor easily. Not only was everything within arm’s reach, but the vendors were all happy to help and answer any questions he had. “I liked how knowledgeable they were about their products.”

The vendors answered all Norton’s questions, gave samples and had a huge variety of produce.

“I like to cook with baby vegetables because they are more tender and flavorful, and there were a ton here. There are also many different types of produce that are very hard to find at stores,” said Norton.

For those with disabilities who want to diversify their food experiences, don’t hesitate to visit the Open Air Farmers’ Market.

“As a foodie, this market is great,” Norton said. “There is so much variety in produce and it is all grown locally. They also had things like fresh salsa that was delicious that I would use to spice up any of my dishes.”

“THE TABLES WERE ALL LOW AND MADE IT EASY FOR ME TO REACH EVERYTHING,” NORTON SAID. “THAT’S NOT SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS FIND AT A PLACE LIKE THIS.”
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“If I had come out at a younger age, my mom would have [had] to deal with that and me being in a wheelchair, so I kept it a secret until I got to college.”

Christina Chambers is a 22-year-old student from Mesa who has a big personality and love of life. She has traveled all over the world to places like Spain, Indonesia, and Australia, enjoying outdoor activities like hiking and kayaking. When she was 12, she woke up paralyzed from the chest down and was diagnosed with a level T-3 spinal cord injury due to transverse myelitis. Although Chambers’ disability doesn’t define who she is, the trauma of her injury pushed her to hide another important part of her identity, in fear of rejection from the ones she loves.

In Chambers’ case, like many others who’ve been faced with the terrifying task of “coming out” as gay, she came out to friends long before coming out to close family members fearing negative or unsupportive reactions.
“I wasn’t sleeping at my house, I was sleeping everywhere but my house,” she said. “I was avoiding my mom because she was the closest person to me.”

One day, her mother came into her room and began questioning her distant behavior, the nights spent away from home, and the lack of communication about what Chambers has been doing.

“I know you have a secret, I know you’re hiding something from me.”

Chambers’ mother first assumed she was seeing a man. This was, of course, not true and the more her mother guessed what was going on the more Chambers hid her nervousness with amusement at the suggestions of her dating men, until finally, she guessed correctly.

“Her first words were, ‘I don’t like it.’ She walked away and went off to work,” Chambers said. “She’s very religious so she asked if I’ve prayed about it and...I’ve tried to pray it away, I’ve tried not to be this way.”

Her mother began accepting her daughter’s sexuality during a call later that same day and gave her the affirmation she needed to hear.

Today, Chambers is happy to say her mom is her biggest fan and is very supportive of her relationship with her current girlfriend, Bridgette Sotelo (25).

The pair met at a local bar in east Mesa called Denim and Diamonds, although they both were reluctant to go. Sotelo immediately noticed that this was no ordinary girl.

“My first impression was that she was a big personality, she had beautiful eyes and wasn’t afraid to be goofy,” Sotelo said. “I got nervous once I saw she was there, but she is a very easy person to talk to, so I quickly warmed up to her.”

The couple will be celebrating their love for life and each other by jumping into the new year together, in the literal sense.

“When we first started dating, Bridgette asked, ‘what’s the craziest thing you’ve ever done?’” Chambers said. “When I said skydiving, she initially thought it was cool and said we should go together.”

“She didn’t know she was talking to the biggest dare-devil in the world,” Chambers said.

They are set to skydive into the new year from Portland, Oregon if all goes according to Chambers’ plan.

For Chambers and many others, her identity as a queer disabled woman is something she would like to see represented in media and celebrated, especially for the sake of the younger generations.

“Be yourself...it’s okay to come out and be exactly who you want to be because I wasted so much time trying to be something I wasn’t, to make other people happy.”
A visitor tries out the Accessible Olli prototype by Local Motors at their booth during the 2018 CES expo in Las Vegas.
Phoenix has become America’s hotspot for testing autonomous vehicles; driverless cars are a common sight for daily commuters in the Valley. In October, Governor Doug Ducey signed an executive order creating the Institute for Automated Mobility, a consortium between companies, universities and public officials to collaborate on autonomous vehicle research.

As progress to a more autonomous roadway continues, it has many in the disability community wondering when they will be able to take advantage of the advancements.

Marcos Castillo, a 35-year-old quadriplegic, lives in Chandler, far from where the Valley’s light rail stretches. Castillo was diagnosed last year with a rare autoimmune disease known as CIPD (chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy).

He believes autonomous vehicles could be extremely beneficial for people with mobility issues. Castillo says he goes through a lot of “hurry up and wait” when using public transportation such as the light rail.

“The biggest challenge is being dropped off and picked up in a timely manner,” said Marcos Castillo. “It makes it hard to be looked at as professional when you always have to make these excuses.”

Right now, Castillo uses his chair and public transportation to get around. He has a vehicle as a last resort, but it is only passenger accessible, meaning Castillo would need someone to drive the car.

Some companies working with autonomous vehicles are trying to expand their services into the disability
Waymo is also one of the most frequently-seen autonomous vehicles around the Valley. Waymo is reaching out to riders, who have disabilities that limit their mobility in different ways. Recently, Waymo partnered with the Foundation for Blind Children and conducted a study in Phoenix this past November to test features such as braille labels and audio cues that could improve ride quality for blind and visually-impaired riders.

“Accessibility is something we care deeply about,” said Haley Morris of Waymo Public Affairs. “Our ultimate goal is to provide a flexible transportation option for those who need it,” said Morris.

Morris said Waymo is also developing a series of programs to make Waymo more accessible, like a convenient mobile application, a visual display and available rider support.

Local Motors, a Tempe-based organization, is taking an entirely new angle on autonomous cars.

Local Motors began as a custom car company in 2007, creating cars like ‘The Rally Fighter’ which appeared in “Transformers: Age of Extinction.”

Enter Accessible Olli.

According to Local Motors, the Accessible Olli is the world’s first cognitive, self-driving vehicle. Its sleek, cubic and tall design intentionally appears as if it belongs in 2030.

“Olli is an autonomous first-and-last-mile vehicle,” Local Motors Executive Vice President Matthew Rivet said. Accessible Olli acts as a shuttle to get riders to and from primary transportation methods, such as airports and light rail stops.

“Everywhere there are these big, large-scale efforts to move people from one place to another. The reality is some people can’t get to those areas.”
Castillo said a program like this could do wonders for the disability community, "Having reliable transportation like that would open up doors and roads for people with mobility issues."

In creating Accessible Olli, Local Motors has had to figure out how to provide the same accessibility as current public transportation without having a driver on board to assist.

"We need to have a vision of what is feasible now and in the future," Vice President of Product Management, Jeff Haye said.

The Accessible Olli program currently has many products in development, many of which were on display at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas.

It is yet to be determined when Accessible Olli's features will be on the road, but Haye said Local Motors plans on testing the accessibility features on pre-commercialized vehicles as soon as next year. In the meantime, Local Motors plans on having manual ramps at stations to assist in accessibility.
How can CILs help?

Editor’s note: This was a critical story for us to tell. We hope that in reading this story, you are prompted to contact your closest Center for Independent Living (CIL), Ability360 or not, and prepare in the case of a natural disaster. In the coming editions of LivAbility, we will be taking a look at similar stories and putting preparedness at the forefront of our readers’ minds.
Shelsey Silva could see the hills of Santa Rosa aflame from the front door of her family's home in the Coffey Park neighborhood of Northern California's Sonoma County. "We prepared for an earthquake, but we weren't expecting a fire," she said.

No one believed the fire could cross the six lanes of nearby Highway 101 (a highway that runs from Los Angeles to the Canadian border). Then, well after midnight on October 9, 2017, Silva's uncle knocked on her door. His family was already in the car; the flames had reached their backyard just down the street.

"We didn't get an emergency warning or anything like that," Silva remembered. "The neighbors were all trying to get out, honking their horns." She only had time to grab her Social Security card.

Silva has cerebral ataxia, causing muscular imbalance. She uses a walker for small distances but primarily uses a powerchair. Although they had an accessible van, her wheelchair was left behind. Her grandmother also has limited mobility and needed assistance during the evacuation. Her father had already left for work. It was Silva's mother who pulled everything together.

Theirs was one of just under 1,500 homes in Coffey Park that burned to the ground. In Northern California, more than 8,000 structures were lost and 42 people died.

The Silva family has since moved into the inaccessible home of a family member. So the family reached out to the Disability Services & Legal Center (DSLC), Santa Rosa's Center for Independent Living (CIL) and Shelsey Silva's employer.

Lake Kowell, DSLC's program director and wheelchair user, worked with a local seating provider to get Silva a powerchair and a ramp installed at their temporary home.

Meanwhile, Kowell of the DSLC was actively searching for anyone who needed assistance.

Then Sonoma County and the city of Santa Rosa opened a Local Assistance Center where a variety of service providers could support survivors.

Those in the Local Assistance Center started working in shifts to connect people to resources days after the fire hit.

The Santa Rosa CIL was improvising. They made trips to thrift stores then began visiting shelters, where state-run Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST) were deployed.

Silva would have had a very different experience were it not for the presence of her family. Kowell who evacuated her own home three days after Silva's burned down said, "My community's the one that saved me."

Roxanne Crawford is the Disability Integration Specialist for Region IX (which includes California and Arizona) for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"Disaster impacts are disproportionate to people with disabilities and other access and functional needs," she said. "CILs need to make emergency preparedness a planning priority because, for their communities, their lives literally depend on it."

Contrary to Santa Rosa's experience, Marin County to the south has a very close partnership with the local CIL. The Disabilities, Access and Functional Needs (DAFN)
Coordinator Lisa Santora said disaster survivors with access and functional needs are taken into account when it comes to emergency planning and exercises.

Marin County is taking lessons from the fires to the north and pitched in where possible, using state relationships to bring down accessible showers for shelters. No such partnership took place in Sonoma County.

FEMA’s Crawford conducts meetings throughout the region, discussing with local emergency managers on how to properly engage with disability partners. “They need to understand the value — and urgency — of viewing disability agencies as partners,” she said.

Kowell learned the lesson. “We’re all working together now,” she said. “It took this chaos for us all to realize, ‘Hey, we need to be communicating. There needs to be a plan.’”

At the urging of the California Foundation for Independent Living Center’s Executive Director Christina Mills, Kowell plans to attend training to become a member of FAST.

There is a common saying in the emergency management world: “All disasters start and end locally.”

It was Silva’s family that pulled themselves together and mostly managed their own response. In Kowell’s case, “The
community was so giving at this point. Everybody just wanted to know, ‘What can we do?’”

FEMA’s Crawford also stresses relationship building as a key component of emergency preparedness. “When you need a friend it’s too late to make one,” she said. “You need to build these relationships ahead of time.”

According to the U.S. Census, around six percent of California’s population has ambulatory limitations, nearly three percent has a hearing disability, and two percent has a vision disability. Communication in alternative forms—from American Sign Language to text messages—is an often overlooked aspect of DAFN needs that can be addressed through working relationships with disability agencies. Accessible emergency housing is another extreme problem, especially where affordable housing is already limited.

The wildfires in California serve as a sobering reminder of the devastation that natural disasters can cause. It’s our duty to urge our readers that discussing and having an evacuation plan and emergency plan in a community is necessary and vital.
For too long, video games have permeated the screen, dominated pop culture, inspired memes, movies and even jobs (hello, Fortnite). With increased technological innovation and advancement, the days of non-accessible video gaming are coming to a close. As the new year dawns upon us, it could be time to cash in on a new accessible video game console or controller. Let’s break down some of the top options.

**XOGO**

“Simplifying Technology, for Everyone”

XOGO is a cable box that allows you to plug into any device that is compatible with USB, Bluetooth, WiFi and 3.5mm jack inputs. The box can plug into a gaming device such as an Xbox or PlayStation 4 and be emulated as a controller. Basically, it acts as a converter box. All you have to do is connect an accessible joystick or buttons (differentiates between games) to the XOGO then plug into the gaming console.

The console will think the standard controller is being used, but in fact, it’s the XOGO.

**PRICE:** XOGO will be available very soon. You can learn how and when to get it through its newsletter at myxogo.com/getxogo.

**Xbox Adaptive Controller**

“Game your way.”

The Xbox Adaptive Controller is similar to the XOGO but it is only for Xbox gaming devices and Windows 10 PC. External devices such as joysticks, switches, buttons and mounts can be connected to the adaptive controller. You can use your hand, shoulder, chin, foot – just about anything – on this controller.

**PRICE:** Available through Microsoft for $99.99.

**QuadStick**

“A game controller for quadriplegics.”

The QuadStick is a hands-free gaming device. There are three different models and three different pricing options for the QuadStick.

The original model is the most affordable that has four sip/puff pressure sensors as well as a lip position sensor that can be assigned to output to any game controller button or axis, or to any mouse movement, button or keyboard.

The Singleton model has a joystick and one sip/puff pressure sensor; it’s a good option for users who don’t need the complexity of a game controller and want to play on a personal computer.

Finally, the FPS model has the same number of sensors as the original model. It can be outputted to any mouse movement, button or keyboard key. The input and outputs can be customized by the user and changed quickly while in-game.

They also sell mounting arm kits.

**PRICE:** Original - $399 / Singleton - $449 / FPS - $549

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**NEW ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY**

As Technology Rapidly Advances, Are the Days of Inaccessible Gaming Coming to a Close? by Matt Lively
Situated almost 9,000 feet above sea level and surrounded by snow-capped mountains and aspen groves, it’s 7 a.m., 46 degrees and time to get to work.

“My commute is a lot easier in the summer,” Jake O’Connor chuckled as he wheelies across his loose gravel driveway on his way to his custom-built shop resembling a barn about 300 yards away from his home in Crested Butte, Colorado. The home he shares with his wife Meredith and newborn baby girl, Emelyn.

O’Connor, who spent years as a general contractor and construction worker, spent much of his early career building things to keep people in one place: prison. Nowadays, he builds quite the opposite.

“I used to cut two-by-fours, now I cut steel tubing.”

ReActive Adaptations was founded in 2008 after O’Connor, who is a T12 paraplegic, tried some of the first off-road handcycles.

“They were really cool but I quickly realized that I could build something even better,” O’Connor
said as he opened the garage door to his shop. He designs and builds off-road handcycles for a wide variety of disabilities—from spinal cord injuries to amputees and anything in-between. Most are hand-pedal, but then there’s the Stinger, a full-suspension recumbent bike pedaled by legs.

More recent are the adjustable handcycles for kids, “...since there’s nothing on the market for them and they want to go ride bikes just like all their A.B. friends,” O’Connor explained as he put on his welding helmet and rolled over to his frame jig that resembled more of a pig roaster than a traditional stationary jig.

“I’ve had to design some things in the shop specifically for me,” he explained. “I can’t simply stand up and change my position for welding so I built this,” he pointed to the pig roasting contraption. “Now the frames swivel and I don’t have to.”

O’Connor slipped the leather apron over his grease-stricken jeans and a 90’s rock band t-shirt.

“I learned the hard way that when you’re welding and cutting in a wheelchair,” he looked at me with his eyebrow raised, “and you can’t feel your legs—”

“Enough said!” I chuckled, “The leather welder apron seems like a good choice.”

O’Connor’s projects are scattered around the shop. From full-suspension prototypes and fat bikes that fold down for travel to homemade monoskies and easy-load hitch racks for quadriplegics, the gears in O’Connor’s mind are always spinning, and his hands quickly follow.

“Off-road handcycles were a way for me to get back out there again,” he said lifting up his welding shield, “I love the mountains, fly fishing, taking the dog out, riding with my wife and all the other things they have to offer. It’s hard to access these places in a wheelchair, but on my Bomber [handcycle] I’m able to go almost anywhere I want.”

In fact, he’s often seen crossing streams or fly fishing on his Bomber handcycle that comes up to his knees or higher.

ReActive Adaptations has shipped bikes all over the USA as well as internationally. He was the first to design an electric-assist off-road handcycle that quadriplegics can ride (called the Nuke) and is continually innovating and making improvements. If O’Connor thinks he can build one better, he’ll try.
“The electric assist just makes it a lot more fun for most people,” he explained while pointing to a battery on a nearby cherry red bike that was being assembled. “Instead of being completely fried after five or so miles, people can ride 15 to 20 plus miles and actually keep up with their friends, family or whatever. There’s a lot of trails many people just couldn’t do without it.”

While there’s been significant growth in the off-road handcycle industry over the past few years, ReActive remains one of the only bikes that are exclusively handmade in the U.S.

As we finished up for the day, I asked O’Connor if he had any new products he wished to tell us about coming down the pipeline.

“Well Kirk,” he said with a sparkle in his eyes, “With Emelyn here, it may be time to figure out how to take her riding with me.”
The power of the love that parents have for their children is the power behind the Junior Adaptive Athletes in Motion (JAAM) Foundation. Founded in 2016, the mission of the JAAM Foundation is to provide adaptive sports equipment to junior athletes in the Phoenix area. Liz and Brad Williams started JAAM to support their son and wheelchair athlete, Evan Williams, who has spastic diplegia cerebral palsy.

“Evan’s attitude and abilities have always conquered his disability,” said his mother, Liz Williams. “If I were to describe Evan, I would say smart, funny and determined but never disabled.”

The JAAM Foundation helps junior athletes like Evan Williams navigate the national grant process as they apply for equipment funds. JAAM also supports the existing adaptive programs in the Valley, including Ability360, by providing program equipment for junior athletes. This enables new athletes to experience different sports opportunities and see what is best for them. Once an athlete commits to a specific sport(s), JAAM will assist in securing customized equipment for each athlete.

“Sports have made a huge impact on my life – they have made me into the person that I am today,” Evan Williams said. “Sports brought empowerment to my life by making me feel like I am doing something important.”

As a partner of Ability360, JAAM is a supporter of the Healthy Teens, Healthy Communities Initiative. Its generous support of this program, as well as the continued support of Thunderbird Charities, has enabled Ability360 to focus on this critical part of our community for our members.

Statistics show how impactful sports are to wheelchair users. Results have shown that only 16 percent of wheelchair users are employed when they aren’t participating in sports. On the other hand, when wheelchair users are involved in sports, that number jumps to 58 percent.

Evan Williams is a member of the Ability360 Youth Wheelchair Basketball team and credits the coaching he has received to his success in all areas of his life.
“Coaches will help you become the best that you can be. My best coach, Robby Reed, was one of my first coaches and is my coach and teammate this year. Robby has helped me in so many ways both on and off the court. He has helped me by teaching me the rules of the game and how to act on and off the court,” Evan Williams stated.

Even his older sister can attest to his strength and positive outlook. “Evan is the strongest kid I know. Am I biased being his sister? Most definitely,” said Parker Williams. “The deck of cards Evan was handed in life has not been fair or easy, but he has taken on every obstacle with a smile, determined to be the best he that he can be.”

Evan Williams is currently a high school senior at Scottsdale Prep and is applying to colleges where he hopes to play wheelchair basketball.
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Once a Dry Riverbed, TTL has Become 360’s Go-to Location for Adaptive Water Sports

by Christian Guerithault

Pick a time from dawn until dusk and you can bet there’s something going on at Tempe Town Lake (TTL), the man-made reservoir located just north of ASU’s main campus.

Resurrected in 1999, the urban lake has become a vital part of Ability360 outdoor recreational programs. The lake is a short five-minute drive from Ability360. Programs include dragon boating, kayaking, and paddle boarding; all of which are all-inclusive.

Team Blue, an adaptive dragon boat team is made up of veterans, with or without disabilities, and civilians with disabilities. Dragon boat paddling is a great, low-impact exercise you can do in a group setting.

Team Blue began paddling in October 2017 and continues to paddle at Tempe Town Lake once a week. The team also participates in the occasional regatta or festival.
Kayaking 101 is an adaptive paddling program. The program is for adults and takes place at the lake. It teaches the basics of paddle boarding and kayaking.

Breaking Barriers Youth Program utilizes the lake to learn the basics of kayaking and paddle boarding for kids under 18 years of age.

The all-new Sports 4 Vets program, which began in October 2018, is a weekly sports program that also takes members to TTL to enjoy water sports.

Tempe Town Lake also has many miles of paths for walking and biking, a great beach and kid’s water park. If you like entertainment, TTL hosts numerous concerts and art festivals each year.
The sharp points and rough edges of the Santa Catalina Mountains in Tucson were softened by the winter clouds that rolled down the mountain face like seafoam on a stony beach. The air was fresh and crisp as the last day of November gave Tucsonans a glimpse into what the approaching winter has in store for them. Mary Stack was at home for the day. From her apartment window, she could see the mountains changing shape as the clouds whisked around the peaks; her caregiver moved about the kitchen getting things ready for the weekend.

“I wanted to move somewhere warm… I had a teammate who lived out here and I wanted at least one person I knew… and I love the view,” she said, gesturing to the Santa Catalina Mountains.

Stack has lived in Arizona for four years; she’s originally from Michigan. She moved to the warmth to better enjoy her retirement. From the photos, medals and décor in her home, there is no question as to what she did before retiring.

Powerlifting is an intense sport. Stack would lay on the bench with her lower half strapped down. This ensures that all athletes have to rely solely on their upper body strength and keeps the playing field level.

“Some even say it’s harder than able-bodied lifting,” Stack said.

And rewarding. All over her home are pictures and memorabilia of her powerlifting days.

“I met Clinton first, then Bush twice and my last Paralympics was with Obama,” Stack said as she showed me her photos.

Stack has participated in some of the highest-level competitions including four Paralympics, the Parapan American Games and four Worlds Weightlifting Championships before she was asked to retire in 2014 due to her disability changing.

How a Sport in which an Athlete’s Lower Body is Strapped to a Bench is Freeing a Competitor from Stigmas

by Kade Garner
Her physical strength has allowed her to travel the world, make hundreds of friends, meet three U.S. presidents and lift more than 300 pounds during competition. Her super strength wasn’t a gift—it was something she spent years earning.

It was in her high school adaptive physical education class where she began to shine. A rare, progressive genetic disorder called Pseudohypoparathyroidism kept her in pain and caused her hearing to diminish. And it’s in this class where a teacher saw Stack’s potential as a powerlifter.

“With your short arms and big chest, you could be really good at it,” the P.E. teacher told Stack. She apprehensively agreed to go to a local competition. This competition would change the trajectory of her life. “I was unsure of the idea of it at first, but when we got to the competition, I knew that it was something I could do,” Stacks said.

Stack was able to lift 50 pounds the first time—not a lot, but enough to drive her to succeed. Fast forward to the Paralympics in 2008, when she benched over 300 pounds. “I don’t have one that is most special or rewarding. I have a few moments like that. When I lifted 300 for the first time in competition is one of them. It is something I never thought I’d be able to accomplish,” Stacks replied when I asked her what accomplishment was most rewarding for her.

Powerlifting brought many firsts. Stack was one of the first people with a disability to ever go to the top of the Acropolis of Greece, she walked a good portion of the Great Wall of China, and she was able to meet a six-year-old boy in London who also had Pseudohypoparathyroidism—the first person she’s met with the same disability as herself.

A sport where the athletes’ lower body is strapped down to the bench, frees competitors from the stigmas and challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. For Mary Stack, powerlifting has allowed her to accomplish heavy feats she never thought possible and become stronger every day.
The holidays often invoke memories of a fancy tablescape and the smell of roast and pie filling the air as the family comes together to eat. No one had to know on the other side of the kitchen were strewn pots and pans and a burnt version of the entrée.

I know the feeling of chaotic cooking. Before my stroke, I was a professional chef in Los Angeles who had every gadget from William Sonoma in my arsenal. I’d cook elaborate meals for the families I worked for and presented them on equally intricate platters. I loved how happy my food made them.

After serving 17 people on Thanksgiving, my stroke happened. The brain cells controlling the left side of my motor movements died. Doctors said I would never cook again.

THEY WERE RIGHT—PARTLY. I NEVER COOKED AGAIN. AT LEAST, NOT IN THE WAY I USED TO.

After my stroke, cooking became a part of my recovery. After losing some mobility, cooking became a way for me to fully experience and celebrate my five senses in all their glory. The heftiness of a knife as it slices through squash. The beautiful black char blistering bright red tomatoes. The cackle of oil as it touches a hot pan. The air, pungent with rosemary and thyme.

And the taste. The reward.

My love for food propelled me to discover innovative and healthier ways of preparing the dishes and meals I had enjoyed for so long and to create new dishes within my abilities. I was on a new path of approaching food as medicine but without compromising the endless possibilities of great flavors and tastes. There was something very healing and calming about holding a chef’s knife in my hand and trying to figure out on my own how I was going to chop that carrot, onion or celery stock. The rewarding sound and smell of fresh vegetables sautéing brought me a sense of solace.

I WAS ONCE AGAIN DOING WHAT I LOVE TO DO—CREATING CULINARY ART.

I don’t have any need for those fancy gadgets anymore, not when my knife and my spatula help me cook with all five of my senses. I no longer need to harvest my grains from the depths of the Amazon or import my spices from across the ocean.

Good food doesn’t have to be indulgent. Healthy food doesn’t have to be boring.

Years after physical therapy, cooking is still more than sustenance. It is creating in a soothing, relaxing
Southwestern Chicken & Vegetable Stew
Winter Comfort Stew Full of Southwestern Flavors

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups chopped carrots
- 3 cups chopped celery
- 1 large zucchini, chopped
- 1 large yellow squash, chopped
- 1 sweet red bell pepper chopped
- 1 sweet yellow pepper chopped
- ½ cup flour
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- (1) 19 oz. can black beans, drained & rinsed
- (1) 4 oz cans fire roasted diced green chilies
- (1) 28 oz. can roasted diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 cup diced or shredded cooked chicken breast (can use rotisserie)
- 1 cup fresh spinach leaves or kale leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- salt & pepper to taste

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. In a large pot over medium-high heat, add the butter and olive oil.
2. Add the onion, garlic, carrots and celery; sauté for four to five minutes, until tender and fragrant.
3. Stir in the zucchini, yellow squash and red and yellow peppers. Cook for two minutes until slightly softened.
4. Sprinkle in the flour to create a roux & cook for another minute.
5. Slowly add one cup of vegetable broth while continuously stirring until it starts to thicken & comes together.
6. Slowly pour in the remaining vegetable broth.
7. Stir in the chili powder, garlic powder & red pepper flakes.
8. Add the black beans & the can of roasted diced tomatoes and the can of roasted diced green chilies.
9. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Add chicken, reduce heat to low & simmer uncovered 25-30 minutes with occasional stirring.
10. Stir in the spinach and cider vinegar.
11. Cook an additional three to four minutes or until heated through.
12. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
13. Serve hot garnished with fresh chopped parsley and cotija cheese.
14. Serve with warm tortillas of your choice.

environment until I have a soothing, relaxing, a process of trial & error and ultimately a finished product of one’s efforts.

Now that the new year has started, and the holiday parties are a thing of kitchens’ past, take the time to cook for yourself. Feel—and appreciate—how your knife sinks into a beautiful piece of chicken. Blanket yourself in the aromas you created in the pan.

If you take the time to look at food as therapy for our souls the possibilities are endless on what you can create and what you may learn about yourself as you continue on your journey of what we all call life. Prepare and share a meal with someone you care for and enrich your soul with food.

If you need inspiration, look no further than this recipe for Southwestern Chicken & Vegetable Stew.

Enjoy!

Steve Norton
GETTING LOST AT THE LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

Arizona’s Newest Accessible Camping Area is the Perfect Weekend Getaway

by Kade Garner

As the sun sets, the mountains glow like fire. The jagged rocks kiss the sky like flames while shades of red, orange and yellow dance across the stony features. The last ray of sunshine fades to black and a campfire roars to life as Don Price and his travel companion settle down to make s’mores.

With gray hair that is always neatly combed, a long face that is clean shaven, rectangular glasses, and deep-set, blue eyes, Price looks like your childhood friend’s dad who acted as an extra parent. He wins one’s trust almost right away.

Price has been using a chair for over 30 years. He has always been adventurous and loves the outdoors. During one of his many adventures, Price was involved in a diving accident. The accident resulted in a spinal cord injury and paralysis.

Price’s need for outdoor recreation didn’t change after the accident, but the way he explores new frontiers did.

It’s been more than 15 years since Price went camping, and his reintroduction began at The Lost Dutchman State Park, one of Arizona’s newest accessible camping areas. Located just a few miles northeast of Apache Junction, the park is a great weekend getaway.

With a rich—and sometimes dark—history filled with superstitions and tall tales of gold, ghosts and sometimes murder, the park has been a staple location for adventure-seekers in Arizona for decades.

Now, with the addition of the accessible cabins, the park offers some of its superstition-filled magic to even more patrons.

The natural beauty of the parks is paired with five modern-day cabins that provide electricity, air-conditioning and heat. Each cabin is accessible, but for those who will need to be transferred from chair to bed, cabin one has a queen bed that sits lower to the ground. Campers have an option to get a two-room or three-room cabin, all of which include a queen bed and a pair of bunk beds.

The only real downside is that there are no bathrooms and bed linens are not provided to guests.

Just a short stroll from the cabins are bathroom and shower facilities. Campers who have different levels of mobility may ask for a special code that will allow them to use the family/accessible bathroom.
Getting to the campsite is an easy process. From making a reservation online to checking out at the end of the trip, Lost Dutchman is accessible for campers.

For Price, getting around the park was a bit difficult. For that reason, he decided to come on the trip with a companion who could lend a hand when needed.

They arrived at the park on Friday just as the mountains began to put on a show of colors at sunset. “That’s something to look at,” Price said as he got out of his car and gazed towards the Superstition Mountains.

From the driveway to the cabin door, the path is paved and flush. No lips, no steps, no ramps. It is easy access for people of differing mobilities.

The front door is keyless. Instead, Price entered the last four digits of their confirmation number to get in. The process was easy for Price who has limited finger dexterity. However, closing the door behind him wasn’t quite as simple. “Handles on the door would be good so people who use chairs would have some way to pull the door closed,” said Price.

Entering the cabins is like walking into the woods. The pine used for the walls and ceilings fills the entire room with a pleasant aroma and casts a warm golden glow onto all the surfaces.

“The bed is low which makes it easy to transfer,” said Price. Not only is the bed low for easy access, but coat hooks are found on the walls at different heights for people with different reaches. Electric outlets are located everywhere throughout the cabin—even near the beds.

Windows look out into a desert dusted with wildflowers, cacti and gorgeous rock features. To help tenants enjoy the scenery to the fullest, each cabin has a picnic table in the back as well as a small fire pit with a grill.

This area was the hardest for Price to access. It is just off the pavement and is full of loose gravel and soil. Price suggested having the table on the pavement or at least closer, so someone who uses a chair could pull up right next to it and join in on the fun and food.
The sun went down and the desert got chilly. Price and his friend settled down for the night. The next morning they woke to an unusual sight in Arizona.

Fog fell upon the park like a thick blanket. The sun fought to get a small amount of light through the cotton-colored clouds. Smooth surfaces were beaded with dew.

It was perfect weather to go on a walk. Price explored some of the more accessible trails near camp, sipping on a cup of coffee as he went. As the fog began to lift, Price decided to go fishing.

For those looking to do more than hike, one benefit to camping at the Lost Dutchman is the many things to do nearby. Goldfield ghost town, the Superstition Mountains Museum and other Wild West attractions are just minutes away.

"Just rough it. Here you don't have to rough it too much," laughed Price as he thought about his time at the campsite. For those who have restricted mobility, camping is often not possible (like it was for Price the last 15 years). To them, Price says to try it out. In cabins like the ones at the Lost Dutchman State Park, camping is accessible.
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The Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center has partnered with Max in Motion over the last six years to introduce children with disabilities to various adaptive sports. This year the program will begin in March rather than July.

“We’re getting started earlier this year because we have more and more families asking for more opportunities to get their kids active,” said Gus LaZear, General Manager of Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center.

Since 2013, the Max in Motion Foundation has partnered with Ability360, sponsoring the once-a-month Saturday morning event that provides a unique opportunity for youth to participate in numerous adaptive sports.

“Often this is the first time some of these kids have a chance to enjoy team sports,” LaZear said.

“We love the Max in Motion Clinics for so many reasons,” said Monica Lindmark, mother of Jackson (16) and Holden (12). “Everyone there is so enthusiastic, supportive, and you couldn’t find a more inclusive facility if you tried. Max in Motion has a special place in our hearts.”

There will be one youth adaptive sports clinic a month from March to October in 2019. Each clinic will feature two different sports,
which includes, power soccer, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair baseball, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair hockey and wheelchair tennis.

"The coaches are experienced and relatable," Lindmark said. "Our son, Jackson, has met many mentors and made many friends. Our typical son, Holden, has always been invited to participate as well. Our boys get to play together on an even playing field and they enjoy that interaction."

The Max in Motion youth clinics are open to children 18 years old and younger with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.

Young athletes get to learn skills in each individual sport and they will get to use specialty wheelchairs and equipment used in competition.

"We heard about Max in Motion from one of our therapists about five years ago and decided to come down for a tour," Lindmark said. "We signed the boys up that day and have been coming ever since. Max in Motion also got us involved in other programs like rock climbing and kayaking."

This year Ability360 will be reaching out to families and community organizations outside of Phoenix to recruit kids to come to Phoenix and experience adaptive sports.
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It’s Saturday morning, which means the Christown Spectrum Mall in Phoenix is packed with people—from parents dragging children into Bed Bath & Beyond to teenagers sampling new fragrances at Bath & Body Works.

Among the chaos is Alexis Skye, a tall, lanky woman with bright pink lipstick quietly rifling through the clearance section at Target, untangling shirts with delicate straps from the mess of interlocked hangers and clothing. She pulls out a pair of shorts.

"Cute," she muses, then tries to dip her fingers into the pockets. They’re fake.

She sighs and puts them back.

"The hardest part about picking out women’s clothes is the pockets. They don’t hold anything. I’ll never get used to that."
She laughs at her own words. Women have been begrudging shallow pockets and giving each other knowing looks for as long as modern fashion has existed. Now, Skye is in on the secret.

Skye spent the better part of 38 years fixing what she could never get used to. Seven-year-old Skye’s birth certificate listed her as male in Montgomery, Alabama, and she was put on a rotating cocktail of medication.

“I didn’t have any control over myself,” Skye said. “I couldn’t control my emotions or my body or anything.”

Doctors didn’t know why she was having fits of anger and violence at school (they would later diagnose her with epilepsy, ADHD and autism), and her home life wasn’t much better—Skye’s family fled Alabama after her father molested her, and she was put in an all-male group home where she was often bullied.

“They were taking advantage of me,” Skye said. “... because of my autism, I didn’t really pick up on social cues very often.”

A 2017 survey from the National Center for Learning Disabilities found students with cognitive disabilities are three times more likely to drop out of school due to poor disability resources such as a lack of Individualized Education Programs.

There was more: At the group home, she began to change, and she would encounter violence from the boys. The teenage Skye began staring harder at the peach fuzz around her chin and her stronger jawline. She experimented with clear nail polish, lip gloss and an androgynous wardrobe.

“There were several reasons for it,” said Skye. “To help make my sister and my mom more comfortable, my safety; going out and not really going full femme...and just to see what kind of style I wanted to wear and trying out different things.”

Fast forward more than a decade: Skye is wearing pink patterned leggings and a black top, complaining about pockets in women’s clothing.

It wasn’t an easy transition. Skye dropped out of high school and began finding the right combination of medication to help her with epileptic fits, her ADHD and autism. She started medically and physically transitioning, covering her 5 o’clock shadow with concealer and painting her eyelids with smoky, dark kohl. She takes two forms of hormones: pills and patches. She also takes a testosterone blocker called Spironolactone.

Finally, she was getting control of her own body.

“I have lots of stress in regards to my body and how it pretty much betrayed me during puberty, and I kind of want to right a wrong with it,” Skye said. “Early on when I was transitioning, I felt like I was just wearing female clothes, and it’s like I was only kind of dressed. So transitioning helps alleviate those concerns in my mind and just helping me feel more whole with myself.”

It’s a story Doug West has seen many times as a consumer advocate at Ability360. For the last three years, he has been working with more than 150 people with disabilities to reintegrate them back into the community through work, education and volunteer programs.

“It’s kind of like when you’re uncomfortable in your own skin, you’re just not comfortable all-around,” West said.

In 2017, the National LGBTQ Task Force collected data and concluded the unemployment rate for the trans and non-binary workforce was hovering at around 16 percent, compared to the nine percent of overall employment. The number partly stems from poverty and a lack of school safety during education years.

The last couple of years have been a whirlwind for Skye. She passed her high school equivalency exams and registered for classes at Rio Salado College, which she completed in five months. She graduated from a leadership program and changed the name on her birth certificate to Alexis Skye.

“When she was able to truly be herself, then things started to progress from there,” West said. “So the more comfortable she felt being the woman that she is, the more she was able to follow through on other goals.”

Despite her progress, safety eludes her. On the route she takes every day from the light rail to her house, she can point out where that man was when he ran after her, knife in hand. Just around the corner, a stranger in a van followed her and commanded her to get in. In her own home, in front of her room, a maintenance worker groped her.

“Before transitioning, before all of this, these kinds of encounters would have made me break down into a weeping mess but now I know how to take care of myself,” Skye said.

Now, Skye is working on being more involved in giving back to the trans and disability communities in Phoenix by attending political demonstrations, support groups and education classes. She undergoes electrolysis to get rid of unwanted hair and continues her hormone regimen.

Alexis Skye is in control.
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