Phil Pangrazio

In the midst of COVID-19

“The fragility of our mortality has never felt more real”
Dear Caregivers,

Ability360 thanks each and every caregiver during these difficult times. We invite our readers to take a photo of this page and mention any caregiver you want to thank. Share on social media with #ThankYouCaregivers
Ability360 thanks each and every caregiver during these difficult times. We invite our readers to take a photo of this page and mention any caregiver you want to thank. Share on social media with #ThankYouCaregivers.
By the time you read this, the world may be a far different place.

Or, hell, for that matter, it may all be back to normal.

But today, as we at Ability360 are reacting to the COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic, I’d be remiss if I did not discuss how this impacts people with disabilities. Without question, this outbreak disproportionately affects people with disabilities more than the rest of the population. Our vulnerability is apparent and we may have access to fewer resources. We are all anxious. Blame and frustration are rampant but useless.

The bottom line is that people with disabilities are scared. Many of us have chronic health conditions or are just more susceptible to illness. The thought of catching highly-contagious flu with no known vaccines or effective antivirals is frightening. I’ve seen the concern on many of our consumers and employee’s faces. The look in their eyes is telling! I, too, am scared and share their concerns. It’s hard not to feel helpless with this silent killer spreading its wrath across the globe. The discussion about ventilators is horrifying, and I’ve seen way too many of my friends and colleagues with disabilities spend their last days of life on these machines.

The fragility of our mortality has never felt more real.

This brings me to the most critical issue at hand: how all of this will play in the medical community, the hospitals and doctor’s offices. Will doctors and hospitals engage in rationing of emergency and intensive medical care when making treatment decisions? Will they favor non-disabled or healthier people over persons with disabilities? Many are predicting they will. This will prove deadly for many of us. This prejudice must not be tolerated. Our lives are not misery.

We must ring the alarm loudly and voice our objection and abhorrence to this practice. Disability rights advocates nationwide must demand that all persons with disabilities have non-discriminatory access to life-saving medical care. We are not less valuable or less deserving than other people. Medical rationing is a violation of human rights, civil rights and the legal rights of people with disabilities, and we must not tolerate it!

Yes, my friends, these are indeed trying times!

Concerning preparedness, like most people, I’ve questioned or at least audited my back-up plan. Do I have enough medicine, both prescriptions and over-the-counter medications? What about my durable medical supplies? What about personal care assistance? Can I turn to my neighbors and friends? Whom am I going to call if I need some additional help? And what happens if those individuals have been affected and cannot assist? Do I have enough food in the house? And don’t get me started about the hoarding at the grocery stores. Goodness, gracious! How much toilet paper does a person need? Nothing seems rational during irrational moments like this. I am so thankful for my family, friends and neighbors who have reached out to me to see that I’m ok.

Maybe that will be the upside of all this chaos, the expression of a little more humanity.

Yes, my friends, these are indeed trying times!

And then there is the question of how Centers for Independent Living (CILs) like Ability360 can assist people with disabilities in our community. Like other community-based organizations, we’ve followed the trajectory of news and facts about the pandemic. We’ve made difficult decisions on a day-to-day and hour-by-hour basis as more direction came from our public health officials and local, state, and federal government.

At Ability360, we are taking actions and adjusting our programs and operations as best we can as information and facts guide our decisions. We know our choices
won’t be perfect. Here’s what I do know: We will always try to do what is in the best interest—health and safety—of our employees and those we serve.

Ability360 began by canceling or postponing organizational events and group activities both internally and with our partner agencies. We stopped all direct face-to-face consumer contacts and home visits. Our front line IL staff have begun teleworking, and some programming has morphed into virtual classes. Their ongoing consumer outreach has been received positively and welcomed as anxiety has ratcheted up. We closed the Sports & Fitness Center and Café Cultivate. The Home Care Services program continues to operate to ensure that our consumer’s needs are being met at home. This has not been easy, and we’re all still adjusting to the uncertainty that lies ahead.

Yes, my friends, these are trying times, indeed!

Too often, today’s questions don’t have many right answers. What should our government be doing on a national level? On a local level? What should organizations such as ours be doing? What should other community organizations be doing to assist? And ultimately, what can individuals and families do to ensure that we all get through this alive?

As a quadriplegic, “paralysis” is something that affects me on a neurological level, but in many ways, it is what people worldwide, disabled or not, are dealing with on a scale never-before-encountered. We are all feeling like our movement is restricted. And in fact, it is. Social distancing is the new vernacular. Staying home and isolating is the momentary panacea. One fateful encounter could mean severe illness or worse. One sneeze, one cough, makes us want to go running for the door.

I’m surrounded by many people I consider to be intelligent and perfectly capable of planning. But yet when it comes to something like this, it’s incredibly challenging to develop a plan that does not have as many, if not more, unintended negative consequences. Yesterday we were pondering our options. Today, I feel like we have taken the necessary actions based on the limited options available.

By the time you read this, I’m confident you will see that Ability360 is stepping up and delivering on our commitment to advocacy and serving the community.

Yes, my friends, these are trying times, indeed! And if you’re reading this, I hope you and your loved ones are staying safe, healthy and happy.

Phil Pangrazio
Ability360 President & CEO
What is it that makes a creative team great?


In normal times, this magazine is produced in an old storage room that is home to our creative team. We converse across numerous open-concept desks, and while it’s somewhat chaotic, it ends up working out. In today’s new reality, all content production for Ability360 and LivAbility is coming from our teams’ living rooms, home offices, and kitchens.

While working from home isn’t atypical for our staff, producing a magazine from home is unique for us. We're a collaborative team that thrives off face-to-face interaction and communication.

This wasn’t the magazine that we had planned for you. Literally, at the last moment, we pulled our cover story and put together the photoshoot of Ability360 President & CEO Phil Pangrazio.

LivAbility is a quarterly magazine. We do not tend to write about current events, as often they are old news by the time readers open these pages. But COVID-19 is different and it is a story that will likely be around for years in some shape or form.

However, we believe that it isn’t the only story. That’s why you will still read stories from Chef Steve on a new “plant-forward” recipe that you can try right now, or some tips for making your home more accessible in the Spring, or a rendition of America’s favorite pastime.

This is a colossal effort. Everyone, especially people with disabilities, is full of anxiety and fear of the unknown. All that we can do right now is stay inside, safe, hygienic, and heed the advice from the Centers for Disease Control.

In the meantime, we hope that the stories that we have for you can bring some entertainment, comfort, and an opportunity to escape the madness we are currently surrounded by for some time.

Stay safe, friends.

Loren Worthington  Kasey Kaler
Publisher   Editor
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Kelly Beaubien

Kelly Beaubien has been a member of the Ability360 family for over five years as a caregiver. Kelly has a bachelor’s in education from Arizona State University and teaches English to ESL students. She is the mother of two boys and wife to Ability360 graphic designer, John Beaubien. In her free time, she enjoys crafting and the occasional live 5k or virtual race.

Karam Gafsi

Karam Gafsi is a multimedia journalist with a love for all things video as well as magazine writing. He is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Through his videos and his writing, Gafsi strives to keep his audience not only informed, but entertained.

Angeline Carbajal

Angeline Carbajal is an experienced Program Coordinator at the University of Arizona. She has a passion for storytelling and is living proof you can live without the Oxford comma. She’s a Southwest native and managed to graduate with two degrees from the UA without drinking a single drop of coffee.

Christian Guerithault

Christian Guerithault is an alumnus of Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. 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.

Shane Crowe

Shane Crowe is a senior at Arizona State University where he double majors in journalism and digital culture. Shane was born in Phoenix, Arizona and enjoys camping, making music and pursuing creative projects with his friends. He hopes to one day stick to a regular exercise schedule.

Tony Jackson

Tony Jackson is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. He started playing power soccer in 2009 and has no plans to stop anytime soon. In addition to being an athlete, he puts his journalism skills to use as a broadcaster of power soccer tournaments around the world. He currently works at the Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center, and also coaches and plays for Ability360 FC.

Sarah Farrell

Sarah Farrell is a Texas native, digital journalist, avid hiker and tennis fanatic. She recently finished her master’s in sports journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

Kasey Kaler

Kasey Kaler is a graduate of Gonzaga University’s Sport and Athletic Administration M.A. program and Arizona State’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication B.A. program. Kasey has a passion for producing content for a multitude of platforms and sharing stories to help people view differences as an asset.
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. Steve loves to share his knowledge and expertise in healthy eating, including menu planning, managing a food budget, and cooking with fresh ingredients.

Aitana Yvette Mallari

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 US and writes about health, tech, and amazing people doing amazing things. She is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and probably has a deadline to get to.

Alisa Murphy

Alisa Murphy is from Phoenix, Arizona and is a senior at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. She was a competitive gymnast growing up and loves Mexican food. She is constantly on the hunt for the best burrito in town, and you can occasionally catch her doing cool flips.
SPRUCE UP FOR SPRING!

Story by Sarah Farrell
MEET AN ARIZONA INTERIOR DESIGNER PUTTING ACCESSIBILITY FIRST

When you’re a kid, you dream about what the future will hold, what kind of job you’ll have when you grow up. Many imagine themselves as football stars, veterinarians or teachers. For Maegan Blau, it was always interior design.

“As a kid I was always changing my room around,” she said, “and I painted my bathroom multiple times. I begged my parents, and they were like, ‘Horrible.’ It was not a good paint job, but I just was always into it.”

Some of her love of interior design stemmed from her family. Her grandfather started a furniture business in the Valley, and almost every one of her family members worked there at some point.

The person that really fed Blau’s creative spirit was her aunt, Kim Kulpins, though.

“I think a lot of Maegan’s eye for creativity as well as her passion for design comes from her aunt,” her husband, Chris Blau, said. “They’ve always talked about projects and paint colors and carpets for this room and rugs for that room.”

When Blau launched her own interior design firm, Blue Copper Design, in Phoenix, her aunt continued to be an important source of inspiration. Kulpins redesigns her house quite a bit, and Maegan bounces ideas off of her all the time, Chris said.

BUILDING BLUE COPPER DESIGN

Blau started out in retail after getting a degree in environmental science from Arizona State University. But even there she was drawn to design. She worked in visual merchandising, arranging the clothes and the layout of the store.

At the same time, she was working on renovating and redesigning the first house she bought with Chris. It was her first true taste of interior design.

“From there it became kind of a hobby,” Chris recalled. “Just a way to flex that creative muscle.”

It got to the point where her interest in visual merchandising began to wane, and interior design was always on her mind. “I was like, ‘I don’t really want to deal with that. I just want to design the store.’ And then I would go home and design my house,” Blau said.

That’s when it clicked. She remembered thinking, “Wait a minute, I love design. That’s what I want to do.”

So Blau took a break from retail, married Chris, purchased a retrofitted travel trailer and took off on a ten-month cross-country road trip.

While they were traveling, Blau was researching what it was going to take for her to break into the interior design industry.

When she returned, she enrolled in a program at the American Institute of Interior Design in Fountain Hills, AZ, got her six-month design certificate and began working for design agencies around the Valley. While she got a lot of valuable experience, Blau couldn’t help but think she had a unique perspective she could bring to the design community.
"I'm happy to be in the field this way because I feel like I have a strong why. I have a stronger perspective, and I have something a little different to bring to the table," Blau said. "I'm pretty proud that I found a way to still incorporate that love for design with my disability and actually make it my strong suit as opposed to my detriment."

So she founded Blue Copper Design in 2019.

"I think she always thought that might be an option as a business, but wasn't really quite sure if the income was worth the work," Chris said. "I don't know if it really hit her until design school, or until she decided to jump in with both feet, that there's a big market for that, especially with her wanting to do adaptive design."

Adaptive Design

Blue Copper Design is one of the few design firms in Arizona that specializes in adaptive design.

Blau has completely redesigned her own home, making it 100% wheelchair accessible without feeling "hospital-like." She lovingly describes it as "casual desert" style.

One of her other accessible design projects thus far has been her work with her longtime friend Mari Algarin. The ongoing project has focused mostly on furniture — adding a sleeper sofa that's easy to transfer onto, utilizing lower bookcases that Algarin can access in her manual wheelchair and a craft room where Algarin, a florist, could store all of her supplies.

The biggest challenge for Blau in any design project is being able to take a client's unique taste and ideas, and make it a reality in their space. Like balancing her own Southwest style with Algarin's "Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" theme.

Blau doesn't just work on adaptive projects though.

"Even my nonadaptive clients have asked me questions because they see me, and they are like, 'Oh how would it be for her?' And it gets them thinking," she said. "So they're like, 'What am I going to do when I get older? Can you fit in there, because what if I have a wheelchair in like 20 years?' It's really cool to see someone else get your perspective just from being you."

Blau will continue to share this perspective and pursue her passion, helping people in the Valley access their design dreams.
RUGS CAN BE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Hard flooring is typically preferred among those who use wheels to get around, but rugs can be our friend, too! Utilize rugs in places where you transfer to add more traction and stability to your wheelchair, walker, or other assistive devices. Look for a heavier rug so it stays in place or extra security use rug grips, rug tape or a rug pad to minimize shifting.

KNOW YOUR DIMENSIONS

It is important to know how much room you will need while utilizing all of your devices. Use this number to determine furniture placement, hallway widths, doorway measurements, turn radius clearance and room for transfers. If you use multiple devices, allow enough room for the largest device. Find what is important to you and make room for it.

INVEST IN A ROBOT VACUUM

A clean home is a happy home, and there is no better time than Spring to get cleaning. I don’t care who you are, vacuuming can be a pain therefore we may not do it as often as we like. Investing in a robot vacuum can clean up the daily dust, debris, and pet hair so you can vacuum less and live more. There are so many options now for robot cleaning tools that accommodate a wide range of budgets and features. Look at the specifications online to find what is right for you.

TRY OUT YOUR GREEN THUMB

Now that we have easy access to our outdoor spaces, let’s utilize them! Gardening can be so fun and therapeutic at times, and spring is the perfect time to get planting. Whether you are looking to grow some produce or herbs, or still trying to keep your cactus alive, gardening is a great way to get outside and create something beautiful. Look for raised planters online or at your local hardware store to bring your plants off the ground and up to you. You can even commission a contractor or woodworker to build some simple wood planter boxes if you are looking for a more custom size or height.

GETTING OUTSIDE!

Spring is the perfect season to enjoy the great outdoors, so let’s make it easier to get outside. I know a lot of you are daredevils who like to pop wheelies and jump curbs to get in and out of your homes, but adding ramps to your main points of entry can reduce stress on your body and mind. Concrete ramps are a great permanent option, and can be done by a trusted contractor. If you are not ready to commit to a permanent ramp there are also great portable options out there.
We support the independent spirit.

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- Over 20 years of experience serving Arizonans. We’ve served members in Arizona since 1989.

UnitedHealthcare Community Plan is a proud sponsor of the Annual African American Conference on Disabilities and the Annual Ability360 Health & Wellness Fair.
The University of Arizona (UArizona) Adaptive Athletics Program continues to challenge the status quo with the addition of the first collegiate adaptive golf program in the U.S.

“We have over a 40-year history [of adaptive sports] here at UArizona and now we are trying to expand our reach even more,” said Peter Hughes, UArizona Adaptive Athletics Director.

Golf is a popular sport in Tucson, Arizona due to the weather and cost of living. Although Hughes didn’t know much about adaptive golf, he recognized the sport was popular in Tucson and catered to visually-impaired athletes.

“We haven’t had adaptive sports for many, many years regarding visually impaired individuals,” said Hughes. “There are a lot of golfers and golf events in Southern Arizona, including the U.S. Blind Golf Association Open in Green Valley. I felt like our program should be furthering this cause.”

In collaboration with local golf simulator business, TeeItUp Enterprises, UArizona’s adaptive golf program was launched in September 2019.

Jon Moore, co-founder of TeeItUp, sparked an initial conversation with Hughes about adaptive sports on an airline flight seven years ago. Four years later, Moore’s son lost his vision and stumbled upon the U.S. Blind Golf Association. When Moore’s son started competing in tournaments throughout the country, a fire was ignited within the pair to increase participation in adaptive golf.

Moore remembered his conversation with Hughes several years prior and gave him a call to pitch the idea of starting a program at UArizona.

Golf marks the seventh sport added to UArizona’s Adaptive Athletics program. The golf team has recruited four athletes, including the newest recruit Bailey Bish.

“It means a lot to me that the University of Arizona has an adaptive golf team. I grew up playing sports, and I have dreamed of playing sports in college ever since I can remember,” said Bish.
A Tucson native, Bish grew up on the fifth hole of the Forty Niner Country Club with her younger sister and parents. She joined the Tanque Verde High School golf team during her freshman year.

“I fell in love with golf because I get to be outside, and it’s very peaceful and quiet,” said Bish.”It was something I was able to do with a weak right side. My right leg and right arm were the problems and with golf, you just need a strong left side to transfer [weight] onto.”

Bish is a freshman at Pima Community College studying logistics and supply chain management. She plans to transfer to UArizona to pursue a degree in organizational leadership or regional commerce.

With the addition of adaptive golf at UArizona, Moore and Hughes plan to help other universities across the West Coast develop programs of their own.

“We’ve got proposals on the table right now with four major universities on the West Coast, and it’s our intention to set up a western adaptive golf conference,” said Moore.

Moore also indicated that the concept could soon make its way to the Midwest with the intention of one day creating a national conference.

“It means a lot to me that the University of Arizona has an adaptive golf team. I grew up playing sports, and I have dreamed of playing sports in college ever since I can remember,” said Bish.

“The more people we can have playing golf, the better it is for our game. The more things we can do to reduce barriers to entry regardless if it’s finances, access to courses or disability, it’s a great thing for everyone who plays golf,” said Jim Anderson, head coach for UArizona men’s golf team. ”I think what the adaptive athletics program is doing is pioneering another opportunity for a market of golfers to exist and hopefully figure out a way to provide people with an opportunity or at least attract people to the University of Arizona thanks to this program.”
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Technology is making the modern world more accessible with every new innovation. Voice-controlled lights and thermostats, and GPS-enabled canes are some of the tools helping people with disabilities live richer lives. There are even devices to make the more intimate parts of life more accessible, too.

Sex is one of the basic foundations of the human experience.

Without it, none of us would be here. Everyone at some point in time has thought about it, some of us more than others. Many people even get to experience it.

For many years, outlets had been few and far between. The oldest and most popular is hiring a sex worker. However, there is still a lot of outdated stigma and shame that comes with employing sex workers. Understandably, there are many people who begrudgingly don their chastity belts, rather than deal with the potential backlash. With the proliferation and ubiquity of the internet, pornography is widely available and easy to find. There is a catch, however; the lack of sharing that experience with another person.

So how could you potentially remove that barrier? In the early 1990s, a few creative (and maybe very horny) inventors worked to answer that question. Teledildonics sprung from the idea of shooting data over the Internet and providing haptic, real-time feedback through adult toys to give internet sex a more personal touch. Just like many things that people try for the first time, early devices were awkward and didn’t quite work as intended. After years of trial and error, there are now several companies around the world creating innovative devices.

Based in Amsterdam, Kiiroo is a leader that has been working to improve access to sex since 2013. Eleanor Hancock is a former academic at the University of Liverpool and a current researcher at Kiiroo. She answered some questions via Skype about the growth and future of teledildonics research.
**Eleanor Hancock (EH):** As a researcher, I don’t think it’s happened enough. I think a lot of people in society as a whole, not just people in the disabled community aren’t aware of this sort of technology. We could be doing a lot more. We need more disabled people to come into the design scope and to try the products, so we can actually design with them in mind.

**LivAbility Magazine (LM):** Have you personally come across anybody with a disability who has used teledildonics?

**EH:** I have. I know that some disabled people have used Kiiroo’s products and really enjoyed them. But I would say that we’re still a long way off, in my opinion, of really reaching out to the disabled community.

**LM:** [Sex] is very much, even in 2020, a very taboo topic to broach. There are very few societies where people can openly have informed, meaningful conversations about it. It’s a very intimate thing. How do we get the word out and educate people that this [technology] exists and is something that could be potentially very beneficial for a lot of people?

**EH:** Well, from a research perspective, I think there needs to actually be some proper academic research done in this area. I’m really, really interested in doing something like that, whether it be interviewing somebody that tried one of our devices, or lead a focus group. I’m hoping that by doing those things, I’ll be able to involve the disabled community more and that will get the word out. And I think as well, perhaps we should start reaching out to more people like you guys.

For people with disabilities, teledildonics can potentially shed many physical and societal barriers. With them, people can experience sex in the privacy of their own homes through their internet-connected devices, such as a cell phone, tablet, or computer. These devices are already modified to make them accessible to their owner. This means that people could experience sex more independently; with the swipe of a finger, puff of a Sip ’n’ Puff tube, or the click of a mouse.

Although teledildonics will never replace sex with another person, they certainly can help close the gap for many people who may otherwise never have a sexual experience. People can enjoy sex in a private and safe setting without the shame and stigma associated with hiring a sex worker. Perhaps society will fully embrace people with disabilities at some point in the future, and teledildonics won’t be needed in that capacity. Until then, technology and innovation will ensure that people don’t have to wait for acceptance.

**In a future edition of LivAbility, we will look further into teledildonics technology, get thoughts from people in the disability community and take a peek into the future. 🌟**
Michael Neher is both an Omeo user and dealer in Oregon.
INTRODUCING THE OMEO
A redefining mobility device by Sarah Farrell

Where can your personal mobility device take you next?

With the Omeo, that answer is quite a bit different than you would think.

The Omeo is a self-balancing personal mobility device that was developed by a creator, Kevin Halsall, in New Zealand. The lithium ion-powered device uses gyroscopes, a series of sensors that coordinate to maintain balance and position to help stay upright no matter what terrain. Gyroscope technology is used in other devices like hoverboards and Onewheel boards.

So how does movement in a device like this work?

You can transfer into the chair with the stabilizing legs, which act as a kickstand, down. Once seated, you can move forward or backward by shifting your weight in the seat. For side-to-side movement, you can either choose to use the traditional joystick or switch the Omeo into seat-steering mode.

Michael Neher is both an Omeo user and dealer in Oregon. He has a C6-C7 spinal cord injury and prior to the Omeo, he used a manual chair.

“In the beginning, it took a little bit of getting used to because it’s obviously different than my manual chair,” he said. “I am now actually more comfortable in this than my manual chair because my manual chair made my back hurt.”

Even without core muscles, Neher is easily able to maneuver the Omeo. The device allows you to adjust the sensitivity of the seat so that even if you have a limited range of motion, you can still take advantage of the full capabilities. The steering in the Omeo is very intuitive to your body movements.

Neher does not use the device when he drives a vehicle though because there is no option to drive from the Omeo yet. There is, however, an option to purchase off-road tires for the Omeo. It is easy to unscrew the original tires, take them off and transition into tires that will allow you to go over rough terrain like gravel and sand. “I can’t emphasize that enough, how easy it is to go,” Neher said.

While the device, similar to its power wheelchair counterparts, is pricey—approximately $17,000—it is making its way onto the U.S. market. Approximately 30 Omeo mobility devices have been delivered as of Spring 2020.

So where can your personal mobility device take you? The answer could very well be more than a traditional power wheelchair.
The job market is full of different opportunities for many people. However, for those who have cognitive or developmental disabilities, finding and keeping a job can be a struggle. The workforce is not always equipped to train and assist employees who have these types of disabilities. Spencer’s Place in Surprise, Arizona, is trying to change that.

Karin York, a special education teacher, and her family are working hard to create a coffee shop and bistro to help train former students and people with disabilities to be successful in their careers.

“In our program, I developed a transition piece where we did real-world experiences, such as job training, everything,” she said. “Real-world practices like interviews and applications.”

She noticed that her students would struggle with getting and keeping jobs after graduation. She wanted to find a way to help them be successful in finding jobs.

Spencer Nickell, York’s son who has down syndrome and is the shop’s namesake, attends a day program that he qualified for through Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Every day in the program, he works for a couple of hours, helping at retirement homes and consignment shops.

However, many of York’s students do not qualify for programs or other services through DDD. Places like Advanced Independence have scholarships available, but they are limited to how many they can provide.

After much deliberation and brainstorming, York decided to build a program of her own.

The goal: to create a place to help train people with developmental disabilities how to work in various entry-level environments and gain on-the-job experience earning at least minimum wage and tips.

Workers will be given specific jobs for their shifts. They will have a coach there to assist them when needed. Jobs include making various drinks and foods, order delivery, dishwashing and more.

Each position will have a simplified checklist that the employee can use to complete their tasks. As they become more comfortable with the task, they can choose to go without the checklist; however, a coach will still be on-hand to assist if needed.

The Spencer’s Place menu consists of coffees, teas, smoothies, wraps, salads and sandwiches. Spencer said he is most excited about the sandwiches.

“We will be using organic foods and drinks in our shop. We will also be offering gluten-free options for our sandwiches and wraps,” York said. Spencer’s Place will also be working with different coffee and tea companies to gain access to quality products.
One of the group’s goals is to have mobile coffee carts to take around the Valley.

“We want to go around and help more people become aware of the program. It would be nice to have lots of little carts all over at schools, sporting events, shopping areas.”

York also wants to take this program to other businesses to use for their own employees.

“My master’s is in curriculum writing. My plan is to take this to schools and businesses and give them this guide to help train individuals with disabilities.” She also wants to take guides to doctor’s offices and other offices to help employees better understand how to assist a person with disabilities.

Spencer’s Place opened its doors in late-January.

“I want people to be enlightened and to see how we are not so different. I want people to come for good food and coffee and not realize that this is a training facility,” York said.

Spencer said he hopes people leave with a smile and like the food.
START YOUR GRILLS...
GRILLS...
The term “plant-forward” comes from the Menus of Change, a public-health initiative created from a collaboration between Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and The Culinary Institute of America at Copia in Napa, California.

Meat may be included, but is not the main feature of the meal. There are many health benefits to plant-forward cooking and eating. By eating less meat, you decrease your risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes and many cancers.

In February, I attended the 2020 Healthy Kitchens Healthy Lives conference. Faculty members from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and other leading medical experts joined world-class culinary educators from The Culinary Institute of America to lead lectures, demonstrations and hands-on cooking sessions for health care professionals from around the world and others. I truly admired how the science of medicine and the science of culinary arts came together. I learned a great deal about plant-forward cooking, eating and the benefits it provides, and had the remarkable opportunity to prepare plant-forward recipes from various cultures that were easy to prepare and delicious.

Going plant-forward is easier than you might think. Start by finding some enticing plant-based recipes that are easy to prepare and have ingredients and flavors you know you will enjoy. There are many good vegetable sources of protein such as artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards, corn, potatoes, peppers, spinach, sweet potatoes and turnip greens. Every vegetable contains some protein, so chances are you may be getting enough protein from your vegetables without eating any meat. Try fixing a meatless meal once a week, then add more days as you get used to it.

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to attend this conference. There, I was exposed to new methods of teaching people to enjoy a wider variety of foods that can help reduce their risk of disease and replace some unhealthy habits. Since my stroke in 2012, I learned to approach food as medicine. As a result, I have lost weight and reduced the amount of medication I take each day to control my diabetes and blood pressure. I feel strongly about educating, empowering and enhancing the lives of other people living with disabilities through what I call “edible ease.”

With this in mind, I received an amazing opportunity with Ability360 to develop a food and nutrition program that will include a combination of lectures, demonstrations and hands-on cooking classes through a collaboration with the Adaptive Services Center of Scottsdale.

The program will be called “360 in the Kitchen,” and the goal of this program is to teach people with disabilities the skills to maximize their independence in the kitchen, which will lead to overall wellness. By changing the manner in which people shop, stock their kitchen/pantry, and cook, people can make smart decisions that lead to overall wellness, both mentally and physically.

Eating plant-forward doesn’t mean it won’t be delicious. You can still enjoy your favorite lean meats, but they will be in a supporting role rather than the main focus of your meal.

Try your first plant-forward recipe that combines fresh veggies and bold flavors with ground turkey to become a nutritious and delicious blended burger.
CHIPOTLE TURKEY AND MUSHROOM BURGER

TOTAL TIME: APPROX. 30 MINUTES / YIELD: 4-5 PATTIES

INGREDIENTS
1 pound baby bella, shiitake or cremini mushrooms, diced (1 or any combination of for a total of 1 pound.)
¼ cup olive oil
4 tablespoonfuls onion, diced
2 Tablespoonfuls garlic, chopped
1 pound ground turkey (ground chicken or lean ground beef)
1 teaspoon chipotle powder
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
4 whole-grain buns, slider or regular-sized buns

INSTRUCTIONS
Sauté the mushrooms with olive oil and 2 tablespoons finely diced onions over medium heat to brown slightly. Add garlic and sauté over low heat for about 10 minutes, until excess moisture is removed. Let cool down completely. It is important not to mix with the meat while it is warm.

In a large mixing bowl, combine sautéed mushrooms with remaining ingredients, mixing gently and seasoning to taste. Form into 4-5 patties. Sauté for 3 minutes on each side to brown and form an outer crust on the burgers, then bake in the oven for about 5 minutes, until done. Serve on a whole-grain burger bun or slider bun, depending on the size of your patty; add your favorite toppings, such as lettuce, tomato and fresh avocado, or try the avocado-mango salsa recipe below.

AVOCADO-MANGO SALSA

YIELD: 8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS
1 avocado, diced
1 cup mango, diced
½ red onion, finely diced
1 cucumber, finely diced
1/8 cup rice wine vinegar
1/8 cup lime juice
1/8 cup extra virgin olive oil
¼ cup cilantro, chopped
1 garlic clove, finely diced

Combine all ingredients and season to taste.

ROASTED VEGGIE FRIES

TOTAL TIME: APPROX. 35 MINUTES / YIELD: 4 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS
1 ½ pounds combination of beets, carrots, sweet potatoes, and turnips
1 ½ tablespoonful avocado oil or plant-based oil of choice
3 cloves of garlic, pressed or finely minced
½ teaspoon smoked paprika
Coarse sea salt and black pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS
Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Wash, peel and dry the vegetables. Using a large knife, carefully cut each vegetable into similar-size pieces, about ¼ inch thick. Place vegetables in a bowl and toss with avocado, garlic and smoked paprika. Arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet. Sprinkle vegetables with sea salt and black pepper to taste. Roast in the oven on the middle rack for 15 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven, turn fries over, then return to the oven and roast an additional 10-15 minutes or until tender and crispy on the edges. Sprinkle with additional sea salt and pepper to taste before serving.

Until our next cooking adventure, keep eating to thrive!

Chef Steve
Brandon Chesser (#30) is a longtime Austin Blackhawks player. In 2014, after the team won the Beep Baseball World Series, his gear was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. (Photo Courtesy of Marge Bancroft)
FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

How the Austin Blackhawks spread the sport of beep baseball

By Sarah Farrell

Steve Puryear picks up his bat, makes his way over to the plate and awaits the first pitch.

“Ready ... pitch ...”

He hears his pitcher, Tim Hibner, chant methodically.

One Mississippi ... SWING.

Puryear can’t see the ball coming at him but after months of repetitive practice, he knows exactly where it will be.

As Puryear makes contact with the ball, he takes off sprinting toward the base. Without a cane or human assistance, he is guided simply by a loud beeping sound 100 feet away.

He contacts the base, still running at full speed, and tackles the large, cylindrical foam pylon to the ground.

Puryear plays a sport called beep baseball—a modified version of America’s pastime for visually impaired athletes.

Beep baseball has been an avenue for many visually impaired athletes to get back into sports and maintain a level of physical activity.

"[It] allows people the ability to show off their athleticism," Brandon Chesser, a teammate of Puryear’s said. "Beep baseball is one of those sports where you’re actually given the opportunity to run full throttle and dive at a pylon, or to throw your body in front of a ball that could be traveling upwards of 80-90 mph coming into the outfield."
What is Beep Baseball?

"People hear blind baseball, and they go, 'First question: How does that work? '" Puryear laughed. "I explain a little bit, and they get the basics of it but when you really get down to it, and in the sport, it’s as much of an intricate sport as Major League Baseball."

It’s played on a large grass field, approximately 200 feet by 200 feet, to provide a soft landing space for diving defensive players. The field is then divided into 10 sections or ‘zones.’ When a ball is hit, the sighted defensive spotter calls out a number that corresponds to a zone on the field. The six defensive players use the number and the beeping of the ball to track and stop it.

“We usually set everybody where three people have a chance to get to a ball regardless of where it’s hit on the field,” team captain Mariano Reynoso said.

In beep baseball, the pitcher and batter are on the same team. The pitcher, a sighted player, stands 20 feet from home plate and throws an underhand pitch to the batter. If the batter makes contact, they take off running to either first or third base — one will start beeping at random.

“We’ve got some athletes, myself included, that will put a ball up in the air for almost six seconds before it hits the ground,” Chesser said, “at which time, we’ve seen base runners hit the base before the ball even hits the ground.”

If the batter makes it to the base before a defensive player controls the ball, they’ve scored a run. If not, they’re out. Then the next batter comes up and starts the process again.

The game is played in six innings with three outs in each.

And it can get highly competitive.

Hibner remembers a trip to the World Series in Minnesota, where he took a ball to the head.

"Just like a boxer, it hit me in the eyebrow," he said.

He shirked off the suggestion to get stitches, cleaned and closed the wound with a butterfly bandage and went back into the game.
"I wasn’t going to leave...” Hibner said. “...I’m the only one.” A medic warned him he’d need to go to a hospital if it happened again. “There’s a lot of pressure on a pitcher to stay in a game,” Hibner stressed.

In beep baseball, a team cannot exist without a combination of visually impaired players and sighted volunteers like Hibner.

The Austin Blackhawks
All of these athletes play for the Austin Blackhawks, one of the oldest teams in the National Beep Baseball Association (NBBA). The team was founded in 1986 by brothers Wayne and Kevin Sibson.

The two started playing beep baseball as members of the Lonestar Roadrunners in Fort Worth, Texas.

“In July of ’83 I got this call from the Fort Worth coach,” Sibson said. “He said, ‘Hey we’re going to the World Series in Minnesota. We’ve got a couple of players that can’t go because they’re injured. Would you be interested in going?’”

So the Sibson brothers traveled to the World Series with the Roadrunners in 1983 and for the next couple of years. At the World Series in 1985, they found out one of the guys from the Fort Worth team would be moving to Austin, so they decided to found their own team there the following spring.

Since 1987, the Blackhawks have attended every Beep Baseball World Series, even in 2000 when it was held in Taiwan, and have won nine titles, the most recent from 2015.

For the Blackhawks, beep baseball is about more than the game; it has become a family affair.

Players, their spouses and children have become part of the team over the years. Most Saturdays, you can find this “family” practicing for hours on end on a patch of grass at an elementary school in north Austin.

Hibner, the team’s pitcher, doesn’t even live in Austin. He resides in Oklahoma City. During the peak of competition, he makes the six-hour drive a couple of times a month to practice and compete with the team.

Beyond the playing field, the Blackhawks have made it their mission to spread the sport they love and educate those around the world.

International Outreach
The Sibson brothers started traveling to other countries to teach beep baseball in the mid 1990’s, traveling first with a group of 12 players to Puerto Rico.

In 1996, a chance encounter at a mall in north Austin led to a second international trip. They were tabling at an event held by Prevention of Blindness when a woman approached the table and started asking questions. The woman was from Taiwan. A few months later, Sibson received a request from the Taiwanese government for the Blackhawks to travel to Taiwan and teach visually impaired athletes there beep baseball. Now there are numerous teams operating in Taiwan. They even send an all-star team to the World Series every year, Chesser said.

Tim Hibner (#0) has been a beep baseball pitcher for decades. Pitching is a cadence thing, he said. "I say, ‘Ready, Pitch’ and I throw the ball. They have about one second, and then they swing. And hopefully they’re swinging in the same place every single time.” (Photo Courtesy of Marge Bancroft)
Taiwan is not the only country the Blackhawks have visited that started a beep baseball program. The Sibsons traveled to Canada, and the team as a whole visited the Dominican Republic in 2015.

"It was just a great experience not only to educate them in our sport, but to educate the country about blindness and blind awareness," Chesser said of the trip to the Dominican Republic. "We showed them that just because these people are blind doesn’t mean they can’t live life...We expressed what all of our players did professionally, and that we do have families."

On the last day of the trip, the two teams played an exhibition game at an MLB stadium in the Dominican Republic in front of 4,000 fans.

In October 2019, the Blackhawks organized a trip to Argentina and went to universities around Buenos Aires. At one stop, they taught future physical education teachers how to play the game. At another, they left some basic equipment like bats and ball, Head Coach Jonathan Flemming said.

For their captain, Mariano Reynoso, the trip was a homecoming. He grew up in Argentina before coming to the U.S. in 1994 to learn English.

"I tried to show everybody there basically what I grew up eating, and also a lot of my friends showed up," Reynoso said. Not only does the team enjoy spreading their love of the game, but these international trips give players the opportunity to experience different cultures as well.

Jaime Sibson has been a longtime Blackhawks player, and recently joined the NBBA as the chair of the Outreach Committee. The NBBA, like the Blackhawks, is hoping to continue the spread of the sport around the world.

"It just kind of gives an opportunity to get out to people who maybe have never played sports before," she said, "or the youth who have played sports in school and are kind of looking for, 'What do I do as a person who's blind as far as athletics?'"

For more information about joining a team or starting a new team in your area, visit nbba.org.
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Aztec Warriors (Fort Worth, TX)
Lonestar Roadrunners (Fort Worth, TX)
BCS Outlaws (College Station, TX)
Bayou City Heat (Houston, TX)
Tyler Tigers (Tyler, TX)

San Antonio Jets (San Antonio, TX)
LV2020 (Las Vegas, NV)
SGV Panthers (Pasadena, CA)
Stockton Stingrays (Stockton, CA)

Contact outreach@nbba.org with questions about starting a team in your area.
Oftentimes, the Earth provides an adaptive aid

By Shane Crowe

Desert trails can be treacherous, even for the most seasoned hikers. Many find sticks and branches along the trail to aid in navigation of these rocky, narrow paths. Mark Zipfel has taken to crafting specialty hiking sticks out of the ribs of fallen saguaro cactuses to better traverse the terrain.

“I started hiking when I moved here about 20 years ago,” Zipfel said. “I was exploring new trails and some of them got a little difficult and tricky. I saw a dead saguaro branch laying on the ground, and I thought ‘I’ll use this to walk.’”

Over the years, Zipfel has crafted a variety of walking sticks with different lengths and grips for his needs regarding specific trails.

“I have neuropathy really bad in my right leg, especially in my right foot,” Zipfel said. “My right foot gets pretty numb, so I don’t really feel the ground.”

Zipfel is also blind in one eye, so he uses his sticks not only to assist with his footing, but for assistance with his depth perception. Both factors are key to navigating steep hikes like Camelback or Piestewa Peak.

“The process begins with me finding a saguaro that has died,” Zipfel said. “Some of the green has fallen off some of the branches, some of the ribs are exposed. So I, along with many, many other people tend to go break off one of those ribs.”

Once I get them out of the ground off the saguaro, I try to break them off to a manageable eight, seven-foot size,” Zipfel said. “Then I bring them home to my shop, which is on my balcony, and I sand them first and cut away parts of the rib that are little bulky or too much for what I want for the walking stick.”

The sticks are then stained and varnished, as well as fitted with a grip that can be made from fabric or pieces of a more porous cactus bone.

Zipfel began utilizing the Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center when it opened to help with his neuropathy.

“I knew that I wanted to work out, and I wanted to get involved with the gym and keep active,” Zipfel said, “because that way when I do get sick again, I will be in a better physical state to rebound more quickly.”

In addition to staying in shape, Zipfel also volunteers at Ability360, assisting two stroke survivors to complete various exercises. Zipfel saw his two worlds come together when those around him at 360 began to notice his craftsmanship. Like, Luke Rumbyrt, a personal trainer at Ability360.

Rumbyrt requested a personalized stick that was about trekking pole height.

“He put a little bead and teddy bear cholla and some extra stuff,” Rumbyrt said. “He just really took his time, he varnished the whole thing, so it’s not going to splinter or break at all.”

The stick is sturdy, lightweight and always garners a few compliments while out on trails, according to Rumbyrt.

Many have asked Zipfel if he sells the sticks and his answer, until recently, has been, “Unfortunately, no.” However, he was recently asked to be a part of the Tempe Sixth Street Market, occurring every Sunday from November to April.

“They told me that if I were to have space every Sunday, that they have nothing like that there,” Zipfel said. “I just need to get set up for that; however, there are only so many saguaros, so I don’t want to get too big. If I got too big, it becomes a manufacturing plant. That’s not me. I’m doing this because I love it, and it helps people.” ☺
Recognizing the trailblazers within the disability community in the place where it all started

Ed Roberts, was a disability rights activist and former executive director of The Center of Independent Living (TheCIL), based in Berkeley, California.

Roberts contracted polio at 14, and when doctors told his family that he would be a “vegetable” for the rest of his life, Roberts said, “If I’m a vegetable, I’ll be an artichoke, prickly on the outside, with a big heart in the middle.”

The Oscars have their gold men—the Ed Roberts Awards have polished white artichokes. The awards recognize and honor individuals who have made contributions to the disability community.

When you’re building a legacy, bits of confusion are just part of the growing pains. This was only the fourth iteration of the awards, presented...
by TheCIL. The concept of a disability awards event is still relatively new.

But then again, the concept of needing such an awards event is new, in itself.

Online, TheCIL lists no official criteria or process for choosing these honorees, other than the fact that the organization is the one that selects them. The implications are up to interpretation.

However, the past always hints at the future. The first Ed Roberts Awards in 2017 honored Tom Bates, former mayor of Berkeley, and former Senator Loni Hancock—two proponents of the disability rights movement. As the years went by, the recipient list not only grew, but included a new wave of honorees: those whose work wasn’t engrained in the movement at all.

Rather, these individuals had careers and businesses that thrived because of the actions that came before them.

It’s a testament to what can happen in the span of a lifetime, and why history in the making is always... in the making. You don’t know how far you’ve come until you look back.

When the disability rights movement began in the 1960s, who would have known that years later, actor Peter Dinklage, a little person, would win multiple awards for his role as Tyrion Lannister in HBO’s “Game of Thrones”?

These historical milestones of representation in media are closer than we think, and those in the disability community who make those strides are often advocates themselves.

Take RJ Mitte, actor and advocate best known for his role as Walter “Flynn” White, Jr. in AMC’s Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning series “Breaking Bad,” who was also the first to receive an Ed Roberts Award at the event.

“People are trying to make this happen, to give opportunities to people who not everyone believes in,” Mitte said. “Disability, or the perception of disability, is really what we’re combating.”

Ali Stroker, the first wheelchair-using actress to appear on Broadway as well as the first wheelchair-using actress to be nominated and win a Tony award, touched on barriers of representation and how to overcome them.

“The moment when we meet each other and see each other in our eyes, representation matters,” she said in an acceptance speech video presented at the event.

Cur8able founder and CEO Stephanie Thomas was recognized for her work as a disability fashion styling expert. A social entrepreneur, her efforts toward accessible fashion have resonated with designers and retailers alike.

And the final award went to Zack Gottsagen, star of “Peanut Butter Falcon,” the highest-grossing independent film of 2019, who made it clear that his work as an actor has only just begun.

Jim Fousekis, who was head of Friends of TheCIL from 1984-1988 and helped secure funding for the organization, was presented a special recognition award for his work.

At the event, many of the guests had disabilities as well. When the ceremony ended, I couldn’t help but overhear two men on their way out of the theater, talking about seeing themselves on screen. Except one didn’t really feel that way.

“Hmph,” he said. “Good for them.”

Good for them?
I stop by the headquarters of TheCIL the next day. Post-awards show, it’s like going to Oz and getting a peek behind the curtain.

It’s located on the second floor of a red-bricked building, and glass doors open up to an office space with brightly colored walls, wheelchairs and some adaptive workout equipment. I hear a pattering of paws and meet Fly, a scruffy office dog that could fit in my camera bag.

Stuart James, the executive director of TheCIL, is in his office. He’s from New York so he asks if I’m sensitive to “colorful” language. I’m not. He breathes a sigh of relief.

You can tell he’s been in hot water before.

I ask him about the Ed Roberts Awards, which celebrates people with disabilities.

“One of the things I found a bit shocking,” James says, “is that the disability community doesn’t necessarily ever celebrate the successes of people with disabilities, in a way that they should.

A lot of times people who are really successful in the disability community, get labeled a ‘super crip’—and that’s not a positive term. That’s a negative term as if they’re special: ‘Don’t compare me to them, they’re able to do something great.’ That doesn’t mean I have to do something great.”

He pauses.

“You know, I used to be an agent for sports. Millions of kids wanna play in the NFL. Millions of kids want to play professional sports, and parents spend thousands of dollars for their kids to participate in youth programs.”

James leans closer like he’s sharing a secret.

“Less than 1% of those kids are ever gonna make it.”

How many kids in the world would love to be LeBron James, he asks. But who has LeBron James’ talent? Nobody. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t celebrate LeBron James.

Before working at TheCIL, James had worked in show business.

“It’s a tough town,” he says. “And it’s a tough town for anybody.”

But what is it like to work in Hollywood, where so many able-bodied people already struggle with representation?

According to a study from the University of Southern California Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, out of 900 popular movies from 2007 to 2016, only 2.7% of characters with speaking roles were portrayed as disabled. That’s a small amount of representation for the largest minority group in the U.S.

“For people with disabilities,” he says, “it’s exceptionally hard because we’re not in the scripts. We’re not in the stories.”

About 20 years ago, he did casting with prominent directors.

The Ed Roberts Awards winners are given polished white artichokes, symbolic for their prickly outside and large heart on the inside.
It was a different commercial every day, and they received a lot of actors. But whenever there was an opportunity related to disability, it was almost impossible to find actors.

"It's a tough industry to break into because there aren't a lot of roles. A lot of kids would like to pursue it but don't. Acting schools—the really good acting schools—I don't know if they're particularly friendly or open to people with disabilities. So you have this vicious cycle: not enough roles, so there's not a lot of people pursuing it.

"It's a vicious cycle and we hope it changes soon, hopefully with things like "Peanut Butter Falcon" and whatever else is coming down the line," he said.

More stories with disabilities leads to more roles, more roles mean more opportunities, more opportunities mean more agents willing to represent, and the road gets a little easier. But to James, that doesn't change the fact that making it in Hollywood just isn't easy in general—for anyone.

James's own experience was different. He's aggressive. Personable. Socially engaged. And really, really good at networking. Hollywood played to his strengths. And in his experience, the harder he worked for himself, the more people in Hollywood wanted to help.

He keeps this philosophy close when he speaks to young kids with disabilities, who are the focus of TheCIL's programs.

"I never want to imply or make anyone think that these things that they want to do are easy," he said. "They're going to be hard. And in all likelihood it'll be harder for them than an abled person. But my take on that is—at this point, who cares? The person I'm talking to isn't going to change tomorrow. Today might not be easy, but don't worry about it. We can't fix that. It's really about your journey, and your journey means you gotta work harder than them and show up. It ain't gonna kill you."

If the entire disability movement in U.S. history, all its efforts in representation and inclusion, were put on a dial from zero, the needle wouldn't move too far. And even though it's been years, James says it might look like it never moved at all. But that's not the case.

Sometimes it means making things harder, but that's not always a bad thing. If next year's round of honorees are harder to select due to an influx of worthy contenders, that's good. If conversations and plans about disability and inclusion get trickier, at least they're happening. It's exhausting, but it's worth it and worth celebrating every bit.

Dealing with the prickly side of things is easy, once you get to the heart of it. 😊
Attention. Attention must be paid.

Arthur Miller, “Death of a Salesman”

1

There’s the dropping of things—impossible
to retrieve from the wheelchair—
or the crutch-tips losing purchase
on a wet tile floor.
Then comes his dis-assembling,
like a high-rise crane, suddenly toppling,
careens down scaffolds.

There is no grace in mopping up
dignity spattered bare.

Some days go wrong from the waking—
I linger, then, in bed,
shutting out his brace thudding
and his chest pitching

Retreat into a nubbin, a nut
palmed hard. Burrow
into down blankets,
his nets flung far.

Stanch the pain.
Tie off shame.

This bruise goes deep.

I pirouette on eggs.
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TRAVEL COMFORTABLY

Sleepbox lounge provides new alternative for weary travelers

by Alisa Murphy
IS THERE ANY WAY TO MAKE AN EIGHT-HOUR LAYOVER A LITTLE MORE BEARABLE?

The idea to improve the travel experience—and more importantly, the delayed travel experience—led to Sleepbox, Inc., a company on a mission to help ease a traveler’s frustration with delays, layovers and cancellations with micro-hotel rooms and nap lounges in airports around the U.S.

When it comes to traveling, “I believe that Sleepbox can change the way we feel about travel and reduce the fear of delays and the frustration of long layovers. It is so much easier to leave your comfort zone and explore the world when you know you have access to privacy when you need it,” Mikhail Krymov, Sleepbox co-founder and CEO, said in a press release.

Currently, a Sleepbox Lounge consisting of 16 private rooms is located in Concourse A of Washington Dulles International Airport in Washington, D.C. including a wheelchair-friendly room. Each room is soundproof and has a twin size bed and other features like Bluetooth speakers and plugs to recharge electronics.

For the ADA room, Krymov added that the room features a twin bed “...but there is much more space near the bed for a wheelchair. There is also a ramp because the entrance is not on the same level as the floor.”

Sleepbox has an application where customers can book rooms for $30 an hour. A room can be reserved for as little as 15 minutes and as long as 12 hours. There is a front desk with staff onsite 24/7 for customer service and maintenance of the rooms.

While there is only one Sleepbox Lounge in the U.S., the company hopes to expand to other airports in the future.

Next potential airport on the list? Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Krymov confirmed that as of late-March, 2020, Sleepbox was currently in the bidding process to build a napping lounge in Phoenix, Arizona.

Krymov invites people with disabilities to make use of the room so that the company can continue to improve its amenities.
What is it about food that brings us together?

People of all different cultures, backgrounds, orientations, upbringings, and yes, disabilities can come together and enjoy a meal.

It was Anthony Bourdain who said, “Meals make the society, hold the fabric together in lots of ways that were charming and interesting and intoxicating to me. The perfect meal, or the best meals, occurs in a context that frequently has very little to do with the food itself.”

Commonly, it’s food, and food only, that offers that peace.

And it was former President Barack Obama who wrote this shortly after Bourdain’s death in 2018: “[Bourdain] taught us about food — but more importantly, about its ability to bring us together. To make us a little less afraid of the unknown.”

FOOD IS BOUNDLESS.

Like the food offered at top-rated San Francisco, California, restaurant Mozzeria, owned by Russell and Melody Stein, who are both Deaf.

This restaurant is something Melody Stein has long dreamed of. You see, she grew up in restaurants. Her parents owned and operated a Chinese establishment in San Francisco.

For Melody Stein, there was only one obvious way forward. And that was to attend the California Culinary Academy and then to open a restaurant of her own.

“I applied in 1993. And because I did go to the California School for the Deaf [K-12], that was on my application, so it was pretty obvious I was Deaf,” Stein said.

When the culinary school called her mother to verify the information, the family was told the academy wouldn’t be able to provide that accommodation.

When her mother pushed them, they indicated that verbal communication was essential in the kitchen, and the safety of Stein and her classmates would be jeopardized.

Two years later, Stein started school at Gallaudet University, a private college for the Deaf and hard of hearing.

It was at Gallaudet that she first met Russell Stein.

“I would have never met him if I hadn’t been turned down by the [California Culinary] school,” Melody Stein said.

While they were dating, she remembers telling Stein about her dream to open a restaurant. He’d never heard of a Deaf-owned restaurant.

It might have taken a little longer than she planned, but she called it.

Mozzeria opened in 2011, offering Neapolitan-style pizza made in an imported Italian wood-burning oven.

The couple — doing their part to ensure that no one is ever denied access the way Melody Stein once was — employs only people who are Deaf to run their pizza place and the two affiliated food trucks.

“Many people have a misconstrued idea that people with disabilities cannot work. They look at us as a burden, as a liability. But we are here to show that we are not,” Melody Stein said.

“We are capable and adaptable.”

The restaurant offers sheets of paper for guests to write orders on and provides resources for patrons who might want to learn a few phrases in sign language, like thank you, pizza, and more, while dining.

Food is a reminder that everyone belongs in some way. The restaurant ensures this. That there is a place for everyone.
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