

JR News

Fall 2016

WORK, HOME AND PLAY

Turned 50

Work

After 17 years of working for the state and federal government, making and implementing public policy affecting persons with disabilities, I received the chance of a lifetime. The Provost of FSU called and expressed interest in adding me to her team. Really? I could go back to Higher ED? It was a no brainer.

I had always dreamed about returning back to my alma mater to focus on teaching the next generation about inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community and workforce. As I have learned, accommodations for persons with disabilities are not special- but rather tools for everyone. Therefore, there was very little time needed for reflection. A job at FSU teaching, advocating, serving, and changing lives would be a dream job. I accepted the Provost offer to join her staff. Heading into Disability Employment Awareness Month ([DEAM](#)), the local media ran a [story](#) on my new role.

I have been very busy discovering how the university has changed since I left nearly 20 years ago. FSU is much bigger with a lot more going on. But, there's much work we can do to better recruit, retain, and transition graduates with disabilities into the workforce. Not only do we need to assist students with disabilities, but we need to empower students without disabilities to make their future businesses barrier-free and open to diverse

sets of talents. Despite the numerous successes of the ADA and related disability laws, persons with disabilities are only working full time at about 18.5%. As a result, Higher ED still has a major role to play in producing qualified members of the disabled community for the workforce.

It is my hope that Florida State can become one of the go-to distinguished institutions that empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their highest level of self-sufficiency, independence, and integration. It is my desire to finish my career in education, where it all began.

Healthcare Update

In the summer 2016 edition of the JR News, I shared my healthcare struggles regarding my leg, pressure sore on the tailbone, and the need to recruit some new personal care assistants (PCA). The leg injury, which made the 10 day anniversary cruise more challenging, has finally healed! Really, after nearly 16 months of wound care and three different sets of IV medications, the doctors and I found the right balance of interventions.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the tailbone issue. Because of the location of this pressure sore, it has the potential of being rather devastating to my independence, health, and overall self-esteem. Like the leg, poor circulation is directly contributing to the lack of progress. One of the wound care doctors is so frustrated that he is recommending surgery to permanently fix the wound. While the surgery would be short (1 hour), the 4 – 6 weeks of healing/rehab (most likely longer) is not something that I currently wrap my head around. FSU, despite being on the job just 90 days, is most willing to accommodate me, but I'm just simply not ready for prolonged rehab process that has no guarantees. Therefore, I will continue to monitor the situation and hope that surgery does not become an absolute necessity.

Falling apart with age is not some silly wives tale, but a well proven truth in the world. Just today, while chewing on a cookie, one of my teeth cracked. And I cannot wait for the four figured cosmetic dentistry bill to fix the problem :) I guess a crown can be my Christmas present to myself.

On the upside, I was fortunate with the PCA recruiting this past summer. I picked up two outstanding young men who both wish to become doctors. Because they are sophomores (just 19 years of age), I am hopeful that I can keep them 2 years or more. I must confess, this next-generation is very service oriented and I am lucky to have these two young men on the team.

Work (cont.)

Another valued part of my professional life is consulting. The university encourages these activities. The consulting world has been busy with articles, training, and trips.

My consulting in the hospitality industry continues with work for the Peabody hotel in Memphis, Tennessee and an emphasis on disability, sensitivity, and awareness. This was a two day training for all of their employees, and I look forward to returning in 2018.

On a different note, this fall, the Florida Association of Restaurants and Lodging ran my article on [ADA Compliance: Now What?](#) The piece can be found on page 56. One of the GM's at a prestigious hotel in South Florida emailed me and commented that he loved the article, and accredited me with most of his knowledge about disability accommodation and service. In a different publication, I was humbled by the International Mobility Magazine that profiled me as the ["Accessibility Pioneer."](#) As I was driving to Memphis for my consulting work at The Peabody, I stopped in Montgomery, Alabama and enjoyed a 50th birthday dinner with two high school classmates (thanks John and Amy). What a great way to bring in the 50th bday!



I was also privileged to be featured in the [Innovative Healthcare Magazine!](#) Not only was I featured, but Erika got a spread as well. The article was titled ["Another Day in Paradise."](#) I don't know why we deserve such PR coverage, but hopefully we can serve as mentors to others. I was honored to be a part of the Florida Able United kickoff at the State Capitol earlier this summer.



Able United is a new program that allows persons with disabilities to save up to \$14,000 per year (tax free) just like anyone else. Most importantly, these resources do not count against one's ability to utilize state and federal support services. This picture was taken just outside of the governor's office.

FUN

Our regular trip to [Rish Park](#) over the 4th of July weekend was spectacular. We had some friends join us from Pennsylvania, and of course we had my full team of aids plus Erika's mother, Sonia. This year's fireworks were a little tricky because of a breeze blowing in from the ocean. But, we managed to put on a good show.



Speaking of good shows, Erika and I enjoyed a rocking night with the Steve Miller band in Tallahassee. It was a different experience to go to a concert at the mall. That's right- a shopping mall with a 10,000 seat amphitheater, ice skating rink, and many more

amenities. It was great to sing along with Steve Miller while he played his classics. He still sounded great as ever with his hit songs like "Fly like an Eagle", "Take the Money and Run", "Abracadabra", and "The Joker."

As covered in my previous newsletter, this year was my 50th birthday. I still remember my father complaining about turning 50, stating he was about half of a century old. Honestly, it's strange, I am now 50 and do not feel old.



I didn't want anything fancy, but Erika insisted on planning and hosting a small get-together to celebrate. Because I'm a kid at heart, we agreed to a bowling party that would be inclusive for everyone. I managed to W on the first game, and Erika managed to come from behind with three strikes in a row to beat me on the second game. It wasn't about winning or losing that day, it was about sharing this special day with good friends.



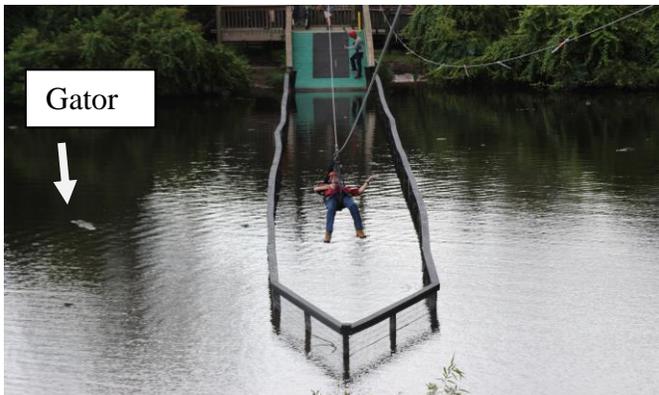
Date night

Sometime between Rish Park and Steve Miller Band, Erika and I were able to dress up for a fun date night. For both of us being 50, I think we look pretty good. Maybe it's the warm weather, good habits, or good genes. Either way, we do our best to stay young at heart.

Labor Day Weekend 2016 was one we won't soon forget. The day before Hurricane Hermine arrived, I had a quick visit to the emergency room for some unexplained and significant muscle spasms. Of course, they did not know why they were occurring, but suggested I reduce the stress in my life...imagine that. The following day, Hermine came through (I slept through the whole thing) but woke up to significant backyard damage, to include a few trees down, and no power. Erika and I were very fortunate that we had previously planned to spend the weekend in Orlando for the FSU vs. Ole Miss game and some other fun activities. This was most fortuitous because we might of not been able to get an accessible room had this not of been planned. The hotel industry is only required to have 1% of their rooms equipped with roll-in showers. So, even on a good day, finding a room for my needs can be challenging. The [Rosen Shingle Creek](#) was better than home for the 5 days the power was out- with room service, clean sheets, and good company.



Tree down from hurricane- only \$1000 to take care of it



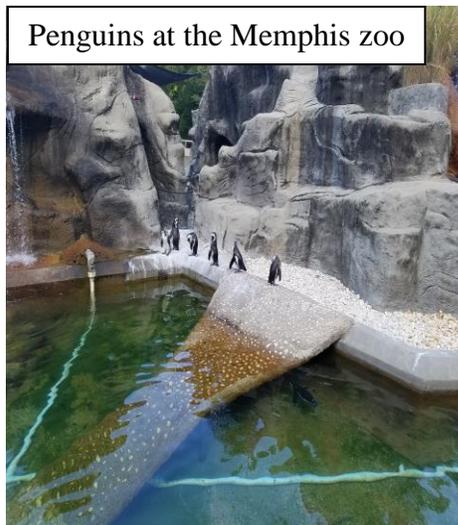
Gator

While in Orlando, I scratched another bucket list item and rode the only wheelchair accessible zip line in Florida. To be honest, I was quite nervous on the drive over to

the park. But I must give high marks to [Gatorland](#) and their whole process. It was simple, safe, and fun. I was ready to go again. The Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, one of Gatorland's partners, captured my [thrill ride](#) to inspire others with disabilities to sail over the gators.

The following day, we enjoyed one of the best FSU football games in a long time. We scored 33 unanswered points, and came back from a 22 point deficit to win 45-34. The excitement in the stadium was simply electrifying. It was great to share the game with a few close buddies of mine, Mike and John.

Also, while in Orlando, we had the great fortune to lunch with a high school classmate for the first time in 33 years. It was wonderful to spend time with Jody and his family.



When traveling, I always try and get in a little bit of fun. For those of you who follow me on Facebook, I shared my experience at the Memphis zoo. Their zoo is quite spectacular-from lions, elephants, monkeys, and giraffes, they have many exotic animals. One of my favorite spots was the penguin exhibit. You will notice they too like ramps for accessing their pond☺

Despite the great start against Ole Miss, FSU football was less than outstanding in 2016. With our three losses in the ACC, we will be lucky to get a respectable post-season Bowl game. As you all know, I try to go to the big games/championships whenever they are in Florida or nearby. This year's National Championship will be held on January 9, 2017.

Unfortunately, with my new job, the new semester at FSU starts on January 9th. Thus, JR and Erika will be sitting this one out. But we might sneak in a few days to Rish Park for the New Year.

MISC.

In every issue, I try and share some interesting observations from life. This issue we have just a couple of items:

One of my buddies sent me this video regarding [future wheelchairs](#). It's something straight out a Jetsins cartoon, and the automation of life. This wheelchair can do everything. While I believe it is possible to imagine such a full functioning chair, I don't think it could practically work- there are too many moving pieces. But, it's still a pretty cool thought, and I'm glad persons with disabilities are not being left behind in innovations of the future.

As most of you know, America is the leader in terms of inclusion for persons with disabilities. There's much work being done around the world, and even through the UN. This past October, Canada celebrated its [18th anniversary accessibility code](#).



www.medicalaccessibility.com

Medical diagnostic equipment is a new frontier within the accessibility world. Simple things like access to a weight scale, exam table, and other important diagnostic equipment will be coming to your doctor's office soon. Here's a great little comic strip on the issue.

And finally, Tallahassee made national news with a [WW II undetonated bomb](#) on campus. They had to bring in the bomb squad who were forced to detonate it, but no damage or injuries occurred. Despite this, there was high drama with many college students being forced to evacuate, including my own administrative assistant.

Until we speak again, may everyone have a fabulous holiday season! While we cannot be with you, know that our thoughts, love, and prayers are with you.

JR