

# We've come a long way with ADA



## Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Thirty years ago Sunday, while signing the American With Disabilities Act, President George Bush (41) stated that, "as the Declaration of Independence has been a beacon for people all over the world seeking freedom, I hope that the ADA will likewise come to be a model for the choices and opportunities of future generations around the world."

Without the hard work of many political leaders on both sides of the aisle, and without the constant pushing of the citizen advocates, this landmark legislation overflowing with opportunities would not have come to fruition.

As I reflect on the past 30 years, I believe not only did the country meet the aspirations established by the ADA, but we have surpassed most of them. One of the most significant signs that the ADA has been successful is the number of similar accessibility standards throughout the world, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Now, persons with disabilities are viewed as respected, contributing citizens rather than some charitable problems to be solved.

The U.S. Congress and the people of America intended that the ADA would open all aspects of American life to individuals with disabilities. This watershed legislation was built upon existing anti-discrimination laws and regulations under the Architectural Barrier Removal Act of 1968, Rehab Act of 1973, and Individual Disability Education Act of 1975. It brought greater opportunities in employment, transportation, housing, recreation and telecommunications to millions of Americans with Disabilities.

We were able to break down the barriers of unjust-

tified segregation and exclusion of people with disabilities from the mainstream American life. We successfully introduced a new "normal" in terms and actions like reasonable accommodations, readily achievable and accessible to everyday activities. These concepts are being advanced even further by People First Language and Employment First initiatives.

With the leadership and support of our public officials, business leaders and citizen advocates, our community and the state of Florida has become one of the most accessible and livable areas in the nation. Year after year, we have chosen to build upon that cornerstone.

By exceeding minimal building accessibility practices and improving our policies and procedures, we have made our communities more open. Our leaders have listened and acted upon community input. We have seen workforce development opportunities for persons with disabilities, greater access to county and city services (buildings and transportation), the design and construction of award-winning family-centered parks (Cascades), the support of adaptive recreation opportunities, and even the ability to get assistance refueling our adaptive vehicles.

Here in the Sunshine State, abilities come in all shapes and sizes. Let us continue the journey of learning to work and play in the same sandbox. We cannot ignore, tolerate or promote discrimination of any kind. Therefore, during the next 30 years, through our places of business and communities, we can harness a significant amount of untapped human potential by simply having the right attitude, utilizing universal design principles, and ensuring reasonable accommodations when appropriate.

With renewed and deliberate efforts, we will continue to improve upon the ADA model that fosters greater access and opportunities for all!

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