

Restaurant guide to rate accessibility for disabled

Examination of city eateries
to be first part of Project
Accessible Syracuse.

By Nancy Buczek
Staff writer

People with disabilities sometimes have a tough time dining out because of parking and access, but a proposed Syracuse University guide could help.

The Central New York Community Foundation gave SU's Center on Human Policy, Law and Disability Studies a \$12,000 grant to support Project Accessible Syracuse, a multiyear project that will research the accessibility of buildings in the city, SU announced late last month. The first year will focus on restaurants in downtown Syracuse.

"Different things matter to different people," said Sara Wall-Bollinger, executive director of Enable, which provides services to enhance the quality of life for people with developmental or physical disabilities. "The guide will let people tailor more the aspects that matter to them. If I'm in a wheelchair, I don't care what kind of chairs you have; I'm not sitting in them anyway."

Project Accessible Syracuse is a joint project of the center, the SU College of Law's Disability Law and Policy Program and Disability Rights Clinic and local organizations such as Enable and ARISE that seek to increase accessibility for people with disabilities in the Syracuse area.

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Grant to help pay for guide

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The age of a building sometimes plays a role in how accessible it is for people with disabilities, Wall-Bollinger said.

"Some of the buildings downtown are very old, and they were never designed with accessibility in mind," she said.

Surveys conducted by SU students and community volunteers of 100 restaurants in downtown Syracuse will help the group rank the eateries according to their compliance with accessibility laws.

Besides creating the free brochures, the research group hopes to post the rankings on the Internet, so they can be annually updated and include any upgrades restaurant owners make to their establishments, said Rebecca Russo, legal program coordinator for the Disability Law and Policy Program that is part of the Center on Human Policy, Law and Disability Studies at the College of Law.

The project will include workshops for restaurant owners and their staffs to talk about accessibility laws, how to increase accessibility and possible funding sources or tax incentives available for modifying their properties, Russo said.

The grant, from the John F. Marsellus Fund, will pay for project supplies and printing and design costs for the restaurant guide, Russo said. The publication date will depend on how long the design process takes once the surveys are finished, she said.

The group's main goals are to educate the community about accessibility issues and increase accessibility throughout Syracuse. But the group is looking forward to another distinction.

"We hope to be a model for other cities," Russo said.

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