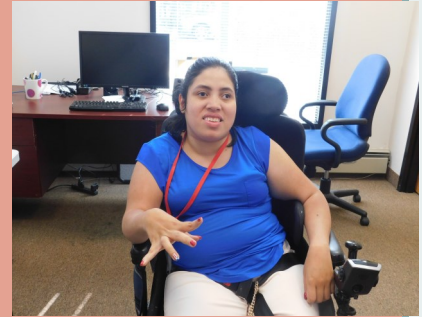




March 2019



Editor's Letter

On July 26, 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law by George H.W. Bush. On July 4 of that same year, I turned five. Due to the closeness of these two events I have been lucky enough to not know a world without the ADA.

I would not have been able to get as far in my education if it were not for this landmark legislation. From the ages of 12 to 18, I attended the Henry Viscardi School. HVS is a K-12 school specifically for children with disabilities. It was there that I grew and learned. I was not made to feel different from my peers because we all faced similar issues. The environment encouraged independence and creativity, two lessons which I have carried with me throughout my life.

These lessons served me well during my time at Dowling and Hofstra. For the first time I went from being one of the many to one of the few with a visible disability. Even though it was a bit intimidating at times it was because of the ADA that I was given the opportunity to overcome my fears and insecurities and receive the same education as my able-bodied peers.

Being born on Independence Day with cerebral palsy can be the height of irony depending on your point of view. I have had to redefine what it means to be independent. The ADA has provided me with a level playing field from which to figure out what independence looks like in my life. This is what disability advocates, past and present, fight for every day. I am forever grateful for their tireless dedication. It is because of them that I am.

EDITOR'S LETTER (CONT.)

In this issue of the New Beacon, we will explore the past, present and future of the ADA. Enjoy!

FEATURE PERSON: MARILYN TUCCI

I had the opportunity to speak to Marilyn Tucci. She is the chair of the transportation committee here at SILO. She first started volunteering in 1987 as a transcriptionist for the original Executive Director, June Roberts. Even though she worked elsewhere she always remained connected to SILO because she believed in its mission. 11 years ago she began working at SILO as an employee.

I wanted to know what she was most proud of in her work on the transportation committee. She is most proud of the system change she has brought about. It is because of her hard work and perseverance that there are mats on every SCAT bus for people with service or guide dogs. She also made it possible for people to not have to tell the reservationist that they needed to use the lift. Now they can just tell the driver when their bus arrives. She is also proud of the fact that she has taught many people how to use the line bus. With her assistance people with disabilities were able to overcome their trepidation about using the buses and lead more independent lives.

I also asked how the transportation system could be improved in Suffolk County. Marilyn believes that the bus system should be extended. We discussed the differences between the Nassau and Suffolk county bus systems. The major difference is that the NICE bus is owned by a private company. This means that they are not accountable to the Nassau County legislature. They can cut bus lines and not have to answer to anyone for it. In contrast, Suffolk County has to answer to County Executive Steve Ballone.

The 28th anniversary of the ADA recently passed. Even though the ADA has granted people with disabilities many rights and protections, I was curious how Marilyn would improve the ADA to better protect people with disabilities civil rights. She



Marilyn Tucci and her service dog Hedwig

FEATURE PERSON: MARILYN TUCCI (CONT.)

follow. Marilyn believes that if specific changes are to be made, people with disabilities need to band together.

SILO recently filed a lawsuit against the MTA/LIRR alleging that they have violated the ADA. Since Marilyn is well versed in this topic I wanted to get her thoughts on what she hopes the lawsuit will achieve. She said, "I hope it makes them realize that people with disabilities ride the train and they do need assistance." She cited the example of Sophia Ardi. Ms. Ardi recently tried to take an ARBOC bus to the mall with Marilyn. They ended up being stuck on the bus for an hour because the bus was too small for Ms. Ardi's chair. These busses are chosen by the county because they are smaller and less expensive. Marilyn believes that this comes at the expense of people with disabilities.

Marilyn would describe herself as a determined advocate. In the time I have known her I believe this is an apt description. She never backs down from a challenge and works hard every day to make sure that people with disabilities are treated fairly when using the public transportation system.

MTA LAWSUIT ANNOUNCEMENT

A press conference was held on June 27 at SILO to announce a lawsuit being brought on by them and Long Island ADAPT against the MTA and the LIRR. The plaintiffs in the case allege that the MTA and LIRR consistently ignore the protections granted by the ADA. The plaintiffs' main complains are that the MTA and LIRR do not provide bridge plates so that people with disabilities can get over the gap easily. They also want more time given in between when a train is announced and when it leaves the station. The time given now is 10 minutes. That is not enough time to find an elevator and navigate the large and bustling train station.

The CEO of SILO, Joseph Delgado, announced the lawsuit. Sen. John Brooks, (D-Massapequa), spoke in support of it. He said that he was saddened by the lawsuit. He was frustrated that the MTA and LIRR would treat citizens with disabilities in this way.

The chair of the Barrier Busters committee, Justin Ainsworth, also spoke. He said, "The LIRR and MTA transports 100 million people annually. Many to what has been called the greatest city in the world. They should live up to that nickname."

Raymond Harewood, a plaintiff in the case also spoke. What drove him to bring the suit was an experience he had with the MTA on his return from a trip into Manhattan. He had to go one further stop on the train because the elevator at his stop was out of service. When he spoke to a representative for the LIRR he was told that they understood the situation but they would do the best they could. Raymond believed that he and all people with disabilities deserved better.

The MTA and LIRR have yet to respond to the lawsuit.

TRANSPORTATION MEETING

Over the summer I sat in on a transportation meeting chaired by Marilyn Tucci. SILO's CEO Joseph Delgado discussed the lawsuit SILO has brought against the LIRR/MTA. He stressed the need for an action plan and culture change from the LIRR/MTA.

The next speaker was Senator John Brooks. Senator Brooks spoke about the difficulties facing the mass transit system. He suggested that the committee come up with an action plan to bring to the LIRR/MTA. He believes this is a good idea because those with disabilities best know what assistance they need to fully take advantage of the public transportation system.

The next speaker was Tracy Westerland. Ms. Westerland talked about why she cannot use a line bus. She uses paratransit to get around because she is blind. She is unable to use the line bus because oftentimes the drivers forget where to drop her off. She spoke about an incident several years ago where she had to walk herself back to her original destination because she was dropped off at the wrong location. A suggestion she made that would help herself and others with visual impairments would be if the bus companies hired a person whose sole job it was to act as someone's eyes. They would take note of where somebody needed to be dropped off and they would alert the driver.

The next speaker was a representative from Legislator Al Krupski's office. Legislator Krupski has put together a committee to address the concerns of commuters with disabilities. The purpose of the committee is to assemble a priority list. It is the hope of the committee that some of the easier things could be taken care of without affecting the budget. Suffolk County is also planning to introduce an app that will allow SCAT riders to track their bus.

TRANSPORTATION MEETING

The findings of the committee were presented at a budget meeting in October.

ADA CELEBRATION



Laurie Delgado, Co-chair of the ADA celebration planning committee.



Felicia Fiano, Co-chair of the ADA celebration planning committee

On July 21, 2018 SILO held its annual ADA celebration. Several county representatives came out to celebrate with the community.

I recently spoke with County Legislator Sarah Anker about her feelings regarding SILO's annual ADA celebration. Legislator Anker feels like the celebration is important because it connects people with disabilities to the larger community and encourages them to learn about SILO and the services it has to offer.

She also spoke about giving a posthumous award to her friend Ginger who worked with Marilyn Tucci to get an accessible bathroom in the clubhouse of her retirement community. Previously, residents with disabilities had to go back to their homes if they needed to use the bathroom. Grace was also able to get a lift for the pool.

In a statement New York State Senator Phil Boyle said of his attendance of SILO's ADA celebration, "It was an honor to receive an invitation to participate in the ADA's annual BBQ Sand Party to celebrate the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. At time of this landmark legislation, I was staffer for the U.S. Congress. I am proud to see that the ADA has made such a positive difference in so many lives. Congratulations on one more year of ensuring that people with disabilities continue to have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else."

Brookhaven Town Supervisor Edward P. Romaine also attended the celebration. He said, "Every year SILO celebrates with the community the passage of the American with Disabilities Act, which was signed into law by President Bush in 1990. It was a pleasure to join SILO in this celebration that underscores that every life is important and deserving of respect and access to opportunities."

A representative from the Board of Elections also attended the celebration. She showed people how to use the accessible voting machines. Participants were able to fill out ballots independently. Even though voting machines are mandated under the ADA and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) it can be difficult to find a machine at your polling location. Even if your polling place has an accessible voting machine the workers do not know how they work. If a person with a disabili-

ADA CELEBRATION (CONT.)

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ity would like to exercise their right to vote it is suggested that they call their local Board of Elections and ask that an accessible voting machine be made available to them. In my personal experience as a voter, I have never seen an accessible voting machine in my polling location. I have always needed the assistance of another person in order to vote.

SILO's annual celebration of the ADA is a fun way for the community to get together. It is a reminder of how far we have come and those that have gotten us there.