

“ADA 20/20: Looking Back, Looking Forward on Mobility”

Summary of Insights and Recommendations

**A Conference Co-Sponsored by
Braun Corporation and the American
Occupational Therapy Association**

**National Press Club
Washington, D.C.**

June 9, 2010

All materials presented by the panelists and all comments by the panelists and attendees were developed independently and solely reflect their opinions and do not necessarily reflect those of Braun Corporation or The American Occupational Therapy Association. The following summary is a compilation of materials presented at the event.

I. Objective

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the goal of this symposium was to capture current thinking and vision around future mobility needs for Americans with disabilities. The gathering of a diverse panel of key thought leaders engaged in a dialogue on:

- Importance of Mobility to American Life, Economy and Democracy
- Current Technology/Support Systems
- Gaps in Education
- Current Attitudes Toward Disability
- Future Needs of Americans with Disabilities

II. Participants

Chair & Moderator

Nadine Vogel
President, Springboard Consulting (“Disability Matters”)
Founder/Past President, Special Needs Advocate for Parents (SNAP)

Speakers

Dr. Peter Blanck, PhD., J.D., Keynote
Chairman, Burton Blatt Institute
Syracuse University

Judith Heumann,
U.S. State Department
International Disability Rights

Mark Lore
Ride-Away Corporation

Andy Imparato
American Association
of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

Karen C. Smith, OT & CAPS
Carol Siebert MS, OTR/L, FAOTA
American Occupational Therapy
Association (AOTA)

Attendees

Ralph Braun
Braun Corporation

Mike Bruno
Bruno Independent Living
Aids

John Bussani
J Bussani, Inc.

Sam Cook
Superior Van & Mobility

Nick Gutwein
Braun Corporation

Dave Hubbard
NMEDA

Toby Long
Georgetown University

Carol Marfisi
Temple University

Paul Musso
Adaptive Driving Alliance

Claudia Olbertreis
Ability Center

Carmen Paterniti
MC Mobility

Bill Siebert
Siebert Mobility, Inc.

Paul Tobin
United Spinal Association
VetsFirst

Midge Waters
Toyota

Carol Wheatley
AOTA

III. Opening Remarks, Moderator Nadine Vogel

“This conference will address what has been accomplished in the 20 years since ADA was passed.... where we are now and what is needed in the future to provide mobility and accessibility to people with disabilities. Further, we want to use what we discuss here to make an impact not only for people with physical disabilities but for the general business and consumer population that have a stake in the well being and success of all Americans.”

IV. Key Insights

- **Need to Create Ongoing Structure for Partnerships Between the Public, Academia, Government and Business Sector**

“The ADA has offered a framework to build on to address access and participation as a collective goal”

(Karen Smith, AOTA)

Traditionally, the “disability rights movement” has served as an umbrella under which government agencies, associations, businesses, etc. promoted different agendas. Participants agreed that a new era is needed where the private and public sector unite to reach common goals of inclusion, accessibility and improved mobility for Americans with disabilities.

“...perhaps unifying different points of view in a single vision statement and collective thinking and action... something where the manufacturers, providers and payers sign-on to further the ideals and goals of the original ADA”

(Paul Tobin, United Spinal Association, VetsFirst)

“One solution is to focus the attention of policymakers on the continuous need for updated and relevant legislation...”

(Andy Imparato, American Association of People with Disabilities)

IV. Key Insights

- **Significant Opportunity for Business Community to Meet Increasing Need to Accommodate People with Physical Disabilities**

“...we’re in a dynamic environment that increasingly requires innovative products.”

(Dr. Peter Blanck, Syracuse University)

When the ADA was passed 20 years ago, many business leaders predicted that conforming to its policies might mean bankruptcy for corporations. Today we know that meeting the changing needs of millions of people is vital. Though accessibility began as an issue of meeting requirements, it is evolving to a moral virtue and national imperative.

- **Businesses Are Leading the Way in Shifting Perceptions of Those With Physical Disabilities...Government Lags Behind**

Today’s business community holds increasingly positive views of employing and meeting the needs of the disabled community, leading a general shift in perception of people with disabilities from “problem” to “opportunity.”

“The business community has an opportunity to really change the way society views people with disabilities... society generally views people with disabilities as a problem that needs to be fixed... industry is really in a position to lead a different attitude.” (Toby Long, Georgetown University)

“The definition of eligibility for Social Security, which is the gateway through which people with disabilities qualify for all supportive programs, requires people to swear that their disability prevents them from engaging in substantial gainful activity, which most people understand to mean that they’re swearing that they can’t work. That definition dates from 1956.” (Andy Imparato, AAPD)

IV. Key Insights

- **The Business and Therapeutic Case for “Universal Design”**

*“...this concept of **universal design** is essentially trying to build and conceptualize products, services and environments in ways that can **maximize access for all and which enhance safety, enhance livability and create economic benefits.**” (Dr. Peter Blanck, Syracuse University)*

Discussion centered on the notion that advancement for people with physical disabilities equaled a net gain for the general population. The concept of universal design as it applies to mobility products, including the hospitality industry and wheelchair-accessible minivans, was viewed as a necessary means to integrating people with physical disabilities into broader society as well as a collective benefit.

“...creating a universally designed community, livable community, a community of the future helps people to realize that what you do as an industry is not about helping people who are different but helping people regardless of their need to be a part of the larger community.” (Carol Siebert, AOTA)

“I think the whole issue of universal design with vehicles is very important because it will give access to mobility to a larger share of the disabled population.” (Judith Heumann, U.S. State Dept)

- **While Significant Progress Has Been Made in Providing Mobility and Accessibility to People with Physical Disabilities...We Still Have Far to Go**

“Though there has been a goal of making it easier for the person with disabilities to be as independent as possible when using public transportation since the ADA was signed, it has been a slow movement and an evolution that is still occurring today.” (Mark Lore, Ride-Away Corporation)

Many participants noted that the ADA led to the adoption of much needed policies and technologies (i.e., modifying public transportation to be accessible to people in wheelchairs), but the journey to full accessibility and mobility for people with physical disabilities has been frustratingly slow.

“We want upward mobility, we want people with disabilities to be able to go everywhere and do everything that everyone else does. My favorite bumper sticker was ‘The ADA, to Boldly Go Where Everyone Else Has Gone Before’.... I think the story that we can tell is that we have made all this progress but we still have work to do.” (Andy Imparato, AAPD)

“...as with anything 20 years old, you can go in one or two directions... you can keep the status quo and not develop or grow to a future where you’re stronger, brighter and you really contribute and I hope that is what happens with not just the ADA but all of us together driving this sector forward so that life can be better for people with disabilities.” (Nick Gutwein, Braun Corporation)

IV. Key Insights

- **Education Needed on Changing Disabilities Landscape...**

Attendees agreed on the importance of mobility to American life.

“Driving is one of the quintessential American symbols of independence and autonomy. It enables access to needed services, social interactions, employment or other activities and responsibilities. For most people driving is an essential activity that keeps them connected to the people and events that bring them meaning.” (Karen Smith, AOTA)

Participants felt that personal independence and freedom are linked to the ability to transport oneself, and as the number of Americans with disabilities increases with the returning of injured military veterans, and baby boomers are taking care of their parents, there is an even greater need to raise awareness to technology and mobility options.

“There’s a much broader audience of individuals who are becoming older.... who have an expectation that they’re going to be able to continue to have mobility within their communities particularly in an area where there isn’t adequate public transportation...” (Judith Heumann, U.S. State Dept)

V. Thought Savers...

- A positive disability experience often translates into wellness and more efficient productivity at work and in life.
- There is an urgent need to educate the emerging group of people affected by aging and disability as well as legislators and policy makers.
- Transportation is the key to independence.
- Companies need to know how to support and keep valued (knowledge) workers on the job as they grow older.
- Workplace accommodations for people with disabilities is not built into the current HR culture.
- Mobility is particularly important for young Americans with disabilities. It can affect their employment, social standing, acceptance and the chance for a productive and independent life.
- A number of different support programs exist out there...but there is still a low level of awareness and collaboration.
- It is vital to find a way to shift thinking from “disability” to “empowerment.”
- For a number of reasons, it’s important to make life a moving experience for all (disabled) people.

VI. Summary of Key Insights

- We've made progress, but we have far to go.
- Business has the opportunity to lead the way to shifting perceptions.
- Universal Design creates economic and daily life benefits for everyone.
- Need to increase awareness of technology and mobility options.
- Need for ongoing collaboration between business, academic and government sectors.

VII.

Concluding

Ralph Braun, Founder/CEO, Braun Corporation

“We have made great strides in providing accessibility to people with physical disabilities, from the days of the Urban Mass Transportation’s Act’s Section 16(b)(2) program, to the ADA. But it’s been a slow journey...too slow. The country needs to find ways to accelerate the process, so that 20 years from now, the world is significantly more accessible than the one we live in today. People with physical disabilities may need special consideration but they are not asking for special treatment...just equal access to all the world has to offer.”