

OP-Ed

by Edward J. Heaton

One Small Step For Man, One Giant Step For a Scooter

In previous columns over the years, I have described my condition as "CP-Lite". After an infection in my right leg, I suddenly became "CP-Heavy," and even worse yet, "CP-Scooter-Dependent".

Until then, I had never personally experienced society's inaccessibility, since I have always walked on crutches and braces. Using a scooter is a whole different ballgame. This realization was driven home to me when I was driving home one night. On my way home, I went through several areas of New Jersey that I was familiar with and had frequented in the past. Now, all of a sudden, all the places I used to go – restaurants, bars, etc. – were inaccessible to me. "Step" is a four-letter word, especially when one has a scooter.

The reason I bring up my increasing disability is an article in the January 2, 2009 edition of The Baltimore Examiner that describes the accessibility (or lack thereof) of the Inaugural Ceremonies for President-Elect Obama. According to the article, drop off points for persons with disabilities will be several blocks from the inauguration and because of traffic restrictions may be difficult if not impossible to reach.

Richard Simms, executive director of the (Washington) D.C. Center for Independent Living, said "This is like a big, bold sign that says if you're a person with a disability, this is not

your event".

Webster's Dictionary defines discrimination as "prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment." The word "discrimination" in common everyday usage usually means a prejudicial act done intentionally. With accessibility issues, there does not seem to be overt intent, just happenstance. This is especially true where the inauguration is concerned. I'm sure the local and national disability advocates will keep track and report back to Congress (who has responsibility for the Inaugural Ceremonies) what needs to be improved for the 2013 inauguration. Now that you know where me and my scooter won't be, let me tell you what I will be doing on inaugural weekend.....

When the Smoke clears....

In about two weeks from the time I'm writing this (January 6th) I am attending the first ever Disability Inaugural Ball in Washington DC. Held at the National Press Club, it will certainly host the "movers and shakers" in national disability policy circles. At press time, President-Elect Obama has not made any announcements on who will be the White House staff liaison on disability issues. By the time of my next column in Disabled Dealer (April 2009), we should have a much better idea on how the new administration intends to proceed on disability policy and who will be leading the charge. I will report back to Disabled Dealer's readers on both the Inaugural Ball and President Obama's staff appointments.

Until then.....

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