

Op-Ed By Edward J. Heaton

Now it gets interesting...

As promised, I am reporting on the first Disability Inaugural Ball held on January 18, 2009 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The event was a smashing success. About 500 disability professionals and advocates were anticipated to attend. The actual attendance was double that: approximately 1,000 individuals.

An event that crowded does have its drawbacks. It was very hard to have a one-on-one conversation with anyone until later in the evening. I saw more friends in the last hour than I did in the first three. That did not put a damper on the absolute joy that was felt by those attending the ball.

If you weren't there, it's very hard to describe the feeling in the room. It was kind of like a whole class of people being called in from eight years out in the cold. This may sound like a cliché, but that's exactly what it was like. Major speakers included former senator Tom Harkin and former representative Tony Coelho, both major architects of the ADA.

Of course, there was music, and of course it was loud. I must be getting older, because I left the dance floor to

younger disability advocates, while trying to preserve what hearing I have left.

Lest you think the Inaugural Ball was all fun and games, an outgrowth of its success was the formation of the Committee on Disability Power & Pride. Quoting from their introductory letter of February 25, "Our aim is to fill a void without competing with the vibrant work being carried out by dozens of disability organizations and countless individuals. Success will therefore be measured by how effectively we can help facilitate cross-community collaboration."

IT'S ABOUT TIME! Regular readers of this column over the last nine years know that on occasion I have railed against silo thinking in the disability community, where organizations representing specific disabilities just are concerned about their piece of the pie, and don't look at the bigger overall disability landscape. If this organization is even partially successful in its goal of increasing "cross-community collaboration," it will be a giant step forward toward achieving overall progress for the disability community. I encourage Disabled Dealer readers to go to www.disabilitypowerandpride.org and sign up for updates on the organization's progress. The more PWDs who join, the wider the organization's scope will be.

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