

Interviews with Handicapped People

What do handicapped people themselves think about the changes being made? With what are they most concerned? In the course of our interviewing we talked to three wheelchair bound individuals. Each of these people was immediately concerned with different aspects of the barrier problem.

The first interview was with Mr. Buddy Fischer of Williamsburg, Virginia. Mr. Fischer is a student at the college. He is taking courses now to prepare for his CPA examination. Mr. Fischer discussed the immediate needs of the campus with us. Fortunately, his classes are in Hugh Jones Hall, which has one accessible entrance and one elevator. Mr. Fischer feels that the biggest problem on campus is the lack of curb cuts. Even the new accessible chemistry building needs a curb cut in back. Mr. Fischer is strong enough to jump curbs when he needs to, but this is somewhat dangerous because he runs the risk of tipping his wheelchair over backwards. For him, a few strategically placed curb cuts would often make a great deal of difference, both on and off campus.

Along with curb cuts, there is a need for handicapped parking. Although Mr. Fischer has a parking permit to park in faculty and staff spaces, he occasionally gets a ticket. This is not a tremendous problem because

one phone call solves everything. However, it would be more logical to have designated parking available. Two or three spaces are all that would be necessary, according to Mr. Fischer.

"Phi Beta Kappa Hall is more trouble than it is worth" for Mr. Fischer. He attended a show there once and has not been back since. Swem Library is adequately accessible and presents no major problems to him. Mr. Fischer also said that there have been many times when he would have liked to have gone to the cafeteria for lunch but knew that he could not get in easily. He feels that all the Commons needs is a single curb cut and a small ramp along one side of the main entrance.

William and Mary Hall is accessible to Mr. Fischer, but he feels there should be wheelchair access signs and special parking in the back. He feels that the parking circle behind Jones Hall is the ideal place for a handicapped space. He would like to see the last parallel parking space (the one closest to the street and almost on the curve) designated for handicapped parking.

One of the biggest problems for the physically handicapped, according to Mr. Fischer, is the inaccessibility of social functions. He would like to be able to enjoy more of the shows and social functions both on campus and in the Williamsburg area, but frequently finds them to be beyond his reach.

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The second handicapped person interviewed was Mrs. Peggy Bendrick of Richmond, Virginia. She is a 52 year old wheelchair bound grandmother. Mrs. Bendrick is also very active in the Virginia Political scene, working for the rights of the handicapped. Mrs. Bendrick ran, unsuccessfully, for the Virginia House of Delegates. She is an active crusader for the handicapped.

Mrs. Bendrick's main grievance is the lax enforcement of the laws and regulations for which she and so many others have fought. This is her principle focus and point of attack. When Mrs. Bendrick discovers a breach of compliance, she approaches the individual or institution involved directly by letter. If she receives no answer she writes again. If she still receives no answer she turns all of her information over to the newspapers, which seem to wait avidly for her next victim. Because she feels that there is no real enforcement of the laws, Mrs. Bendrick believes that enforcement must lie with the individual. Individuals must do the complaining and take action on their complaints when it is necessary. The individual is Mrs. Bendrick's chief orientation.

In spite of the time she spends in the court and council rooms, and raising the three children (out of seven) that are still at home, Mrs. Bendrick also finds time to write poetry. Her poetry expresses some of the

deep feelings, problems and triumphs of being a handicapped person. One of her favorites is quoted below.

I've managed to climb some mountains
and I'm scarred from slipping;
and falling
hurting and crying;but
to those faced with like ascent
of ominous, threatening heights
please, take my hand
come roll with me.

Our final interview was with Mr. John Chappell, Jr. of Yorktown, Virginia. He, too, is extremely active in fighting for the rights of the handicapped, both locally and nationally. He served as a delegate to the White House Conference on the Handicapped. Mr. Chappell has also been very successful in making others in his area aware of the needs of the handicapped. He has been successful in organizing accessibility surveys of Yorktown, Hampton and Mercury Boulevard. Largely as a result of his work, Hampton has recently modified over twenty buildings in order to make them accessible.

Mr. Chappell believes very strongly that if handicapped persons will join together in their cause, much more can be accomplished. He stresses how much impact a concerned group of individuals can have when they present their needs to businessmen and administrators alike. Mr. Chappell is now busy organizing a statewide organization for the handicapped. According to Mr. Chappell, this organization will very likely be called, "Handicaps Unlimited." A group such as this can be very influential in bringing about much needed change.

Since Mr. Chappell stresses organization as a key factor, he hopes that there will soon be a National Center for the Handicapped. A bill has been sponsored by Senator Randolph of West Virginia to establish such a center. Hopefully, organization procedures of this

kind will help alleviate some of the problems with the interpretations and enforcement of the laws that protect the rights of the handicapped.