



# Monday Morning

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[www.njcdd.org/mondaymorning.htm](http://www.njcdd.org/mondaymorning.htm)

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## Attitude, Not Cost, Barrier to Disabled Workers

by Catherine Kom

*The NewStandard* <http://newstandardnews.net>

Recent data shows employers who make an effort to accommodate employees with disabilities can do so at little cost and great benefit, exposing deeper discrimination behind dismal employment numbers.

According to researchers at Cornell University, the employment rate for people with disabilities peaked around 25 percent in the 1990s before dropping below 20 percent by 2004.

The Department of Labor attributes this low employment rate, in part, to the misconception that accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace is prohibitively costly. In fact, research indicates that the opposite is true.

The Labor Department's Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which helps employers hire, retain, and promote people with disabilities, has found that most workplace accommodations can be implemented at little or no cost.

Since cost is not the main barrier, say disability advocates, more needs to change than simply architecture and ergonomics.

"Most disabled people would tell you that the bigger concerns they

have around the workplace are not around physical accessibility," said Andrew Imparato, president of the American Association of People with Disabilities. "They're more around attitudes.

The JAN survey, which will continue through September 2007, released preliminary findings based on feedback from 778 employers that had contacted the agency for information about employing people with disabilities.

The vast majority of the employers surveyed had called because they were interested in learning how to retain their employees, who on average had been employed for seven years and were paid about \$13 per hour.

About half reported that implementing workplace adjustments came at no expense, and about 43 percent reported a one-time cost that averaged around \$600.

The law firm Pillsbury Winthrop

*(continued on page 2)*



### Public Hearings to discuss family support



Six regional public hearings will be held to discuss funding for family support. The hearings are being planned by the Family Support Budget Committee. Legislators from the appropriations committees in the Assembly and Senate, and representatives of provider agencies, will sit on a panel at each location. Family members are encouraged to share their stories with the panel members.

Of the 36,622 individuals on the caseload of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, 23,781, or 65%, reside at home with their families. Only 8.5% of DDD's budget is used to support these individuals.

The hearing dates are: April 24, 25, 26 and May 1, 2 and 3. Locations and times are still being finalized as we go to press. When that information becomes available, it immediately will be posted on the NJCDD website at [www.njddc.org](http://www.njddc.org). ☎

## Attitude, Not Cost, Barrier to Disabled Workers

(continued from page 1)

Shaw Pittman is one company that found cost-effective ways to create a better work environment for disabled employees. The internationally-based firm, which employs over 1,000 people, discovered that minor adjustments like using instant messaging for some office communications and moving desks so that employees' backs were not facing the door could help accommodate two employees with hearing loss.

The JAN report found that of the employers surveyed, nearly nine in 10 reported retaining a valued employee through better workplace accommodations. In addition, three-quarters cited increased productivity, and over half said they eliminated the costs of hiring and training a new employee.

Employers also reported indirect benefits like improved interactions with co-workers and customers, increased company morale and improved workplace safety.

While the results of JAN's survey indicated that many employers of people with disabilities found little cost and great benefit, survey respondents were limited to companies that had sought out the agency to help

them accommodate employees.

Advocates for people with disabilities share a common concern that in the larger market, stereotypes and discrimination present greater hurdles.

"The biggest barriers are still attitudinal," said Linda Richman, deputy executive director of Liberty Resources. In her view, many employers mistakenly believe that hiring a person with a disability means that "you're automatically compromising somehow on the quality or volume of work."

"That means that workers that really want to work [might not] have the right exposure to the business world," she explained, "and it also means employers are still carrying around a lot of misconceptions about what it would really be like to work with a person with a disability every day." ❁

## Union County Monday Morning Network Open Meeting

The Union County Monday Morning Network will be sponsoring an Open Meeting on issues that affect County residents with disabilities. It will be held on Thursday evening, May 4, from 6:30p.m. to 8:30p.m., at the Union County Ad-

ministration Building 10, Elizabethtown Plaza, Elizabeth, NJ.

"This is an opportunity to speak out about access to voting, enforcement of the ADA, transportation, county services and other issues that affect persons with disabilities and their families," said Bruce Bentz, Monday Morning's Union County Network Facilitator.

For more information, contact Bentz, 732-346-0424, or Luke Koppisch, Monday Morning Coordinator, 1-800-216-1199, or email: [luke.koppisch@njddc.org](mailto:luke.koppisch@njddc.org). ❁

## Attention Kmart Shoppers: Suit over access settled

Kmart Corp. has agreed to pay \$13 million to settle a class-action lawsuit accusing the retailer of ignoring federal regulations that govern access for disabled customers.

The settlement, if it wins a judge's approval, would be the largest ever under terms of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The agreement, which plaintiffs' lawyers said could affect hundreds of thousands of Kmart customers, would allot \$12.1 million in damages to class members in California. The remainder would go to plaintiffs in six other states.



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**Monday Morning** is a compilation of news stories from various sources, organized to provide information about proposed federal and state policies, programs and laws to New Jersey's grass-roots disability community. The opinions expressed are not necessarily representative of the opinions of all or a majority of the members of the N.J. Council on Developmental Disabilities. **Monday Morning** is an initiative of the "Monday Morning Project," an effort by disability community advocates to mobilize people with disabilities to preserve the rights they are entitled to under current federal law; to preserve vital support services; and to give people with disabilities and their advocates a major role in determining how federal funds and matching state dollars are used.

Kmart also agreed to spend as much as \$70 million in the next eight years to bring stores around the country into compliance with federal standards for merchandise placement, counters, restrooms, fitting rooms and parking lots.

Amy Robertson, the lead plaintiffs' attorney, said her firm filed the suit after receiving complaints from around the country. She credited Kmart's new management for working quickly to come up with an agreement.

"Their attitude was very can-do," said Robertson. "We are very happy with the result." ❁

## Family Support open forums in Somerset and Union Counties

Regional Family Support Planning Council #3 (serving Somerset and Union Counties) will hold two Educational Forums for individuals who desire to know more about family supports. Invited presentors include Elizabeth Shea, Director of Government Affairs, The ARC of New Jersey; the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN); the Division of Developmental Disabilities; and Monique Wilson, Statewide Family Support coordinator.

The forums will be held in Somerset County, April 25, 2006, 7p.m.-9 p.m., at The Midland School, 94 Readington Road, North Branch, NJ, and in Union County, May 3, 2006, 7p.m.-9p.m., at Temple Emanuel, 756 East Broad Street, Westfield, NJ.

For directions to the forums and for more information, log onto [www.njddc.org/RFSPC3.htm](http://www.njddc.org/RFSPC3.htm).

## Update on bill to crack down on the misuse of parking placards for people with disabilities

The bill to address the misuse of accessible parking placards (A-340), introduced by Assemblyman Joseph Pennacchio, now has a companion in the State Senate. S-1492 recently was introduced by Senator Loretta

Weinberg. As reported in the last issue of *Monday Morning*, the bills would crack down on fraudulent handicapped parking placards by requiring color-coded stickers to be affixed to placards to signify continued validity. The bill also establishes the "Handicapped Parking Education Fund" administered by NJ Motor Vehicle Commission to be used for educational programs about accessible parking laws. For highlights of the bill log onto [www.njddc.org/A340.htm](http://www.njddc.org/A340.htm). ❁

## Responses from Readers

### Bill to cut down on misuse of handicapped parking placards

Although A-340 has some merit; I feel it yet another resource for generating revenue for the state on the backs of the those who can least afford it. It is yet another source of forms to be filled out and approvals to be gotten based on some government workers good or bad day, and do this every three years! It was my understanding that these permits were only issued to those with permanent disabilities. Do they have to be approved as being permanent every three years? For what? And the DMV is proposed to issue an array of colored stickers for validity; they can't even keep track of those that are uninsured in this state! So let's give them something else to check. I really feel

this needs some refinement before it becomes a law that will burden the handicapped and their caretaker/ parents/ guardian with a fee and paperwork we can ill afford to bear.

Thank you for your time.

One very frustrated parent,

ARLENE RUTKOWSKI

*(Ed.'s note: The proposed law does not change current Motor Vehicle Commission requirements to renew permanent placards every three years at no cost.)*

### Disabled Taxi Service

I read in Monday Morning about Disabled Taxi Service. I am all for the idea since it can be paid for personally; no waiting and most important, door-to-door service!

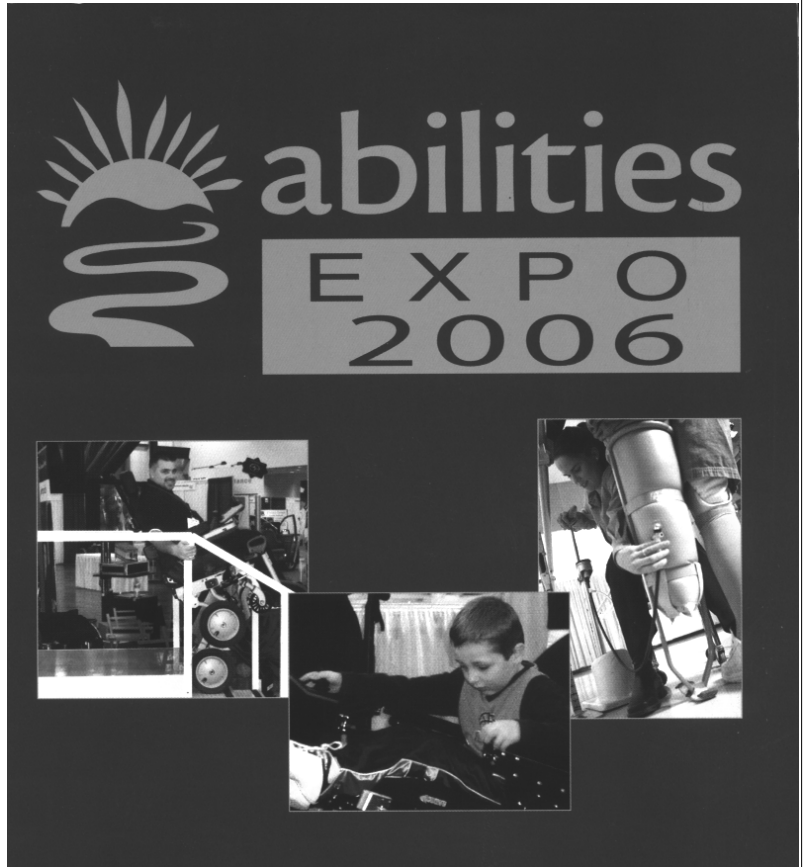
CHARLES MALVASI, JR.

If you have a comment or question regarding any of the articles that appear in *Monday Morning*, log onto [www.njddc.org](http://www.njddc.org) and click on "Send Us A Message." Please include your name. Responses may be edited for space.

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