

This is the Disability Rights Hawaii Newsletter for September 2011. It is available by email, print, or Large Print. Please contact [ronald@hawaii.edu](mailto:ronald@hawaii.edu), or call 961-5601, to add or remove your name from the mailing list, or to change the format of your Newsletter.

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..... September 27 Meeting Announcement .....

Disability Rights Hawaii will meet from 12:00 noon until 2:00 PM at the ADRC building at 1555 Kinoole Street in Hilo. We will discuss accessibility problems and solutions on the Island of Hawaii, and topics of national scope. The first hour of our meeting will be talk-story about local problems. At 1:00 PM our program will begin. This month we have two speakers who will share information about improving accessibility in Hilo. The first is Officer Reynold Kahalewai of the Hawaii Police Department. Officer Kahalewai is responding to DRH's report, forwarded from members of the public, that the Coconut Island accessible parking area has been very badly abused during times of high use -- people park in the access aisles and block abuse the accessible route onto the bridge and the reserved parking space. Officer Kahalewai has researched possible ways of improving the situation, and will advise us on what we can do to keep the area well policed. Our second speaker will be Alan Rudo of County Housing and Community Development. Alan will discuss with us the problems of enforcing the Fair Housing laws that require apartments of more than three units to assure that the ground floor units are wheelchair accessible. Alan has been involved in a recent case of this kind, and will pass on his knowledge to DRH. These two speakers will discuss real-world enforcement of accessibility laws. They have much to teach us (and possibly vice versa).

..... July 29 2011 ADA Celebration (and DRH celebration) .....

Our July DRH meeting was coordinated with the ADA Day celebration at the ADRC Building, sponsored by the Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities. Many DRH members attended the celebration, filled up on the refreshments, cheered for the ADA, and had a wonderful time. DRH members and others set up booths for agencies that they worked with, and discussed the activities that those agencies were involved in. The celebration was not completely joyous, because of the current grim economic situation that we are all experiencing. The Hawaii Centers for Independent Living had, on almost the same day as the celebration, shut down all of its Neighbor Island centers. This left empty space in the ADRC Center, and in many other places around the state. But many agencies were still in operation and present at the celebration.

Wesley Tanigawa, who works with ARC of Hilo, chaired the celebration and organized the proceedings. Participating agencies including Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (represented by longtime DRH member Sam Nagasawa). The County of Hawaii Parks and Recreation Department had its own booth, staffed by Alisa Mitchener (another core DRH member). Alisa reported on a remarkable increase in the accessibility of County recreation programs to

individuals with disabilities. (Alisa herself is primarily responsible for these immense improvements.) Legal Aid, the Heart Association, and other organizations also participated with booths and information.

Proclamations were read from Mayor Billie Kenoi and Governor Neil Abercrombie, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is a great relief that the 20-year-old law is having some effect on the environment. I (Ron) gave a short report (as short as I could make it) on the differences between 1991 and 2011 in how difficult it was to get people to recognize the needs of people with disabilities. One huge difference is simply the generations of the people who are in positions of power. In the 1990s, when DRH activists tried to talk to business managers or government officials, the immediate reaction was that they have other things to worry about. Twenty years of lawsuits -- plus, maybe, some good intentions -- have changed that. Business managers and government administrators are now much more familiar with the law, and with the personal needs that require accommodation.

Paige De Lima, who is now the Chair of the Mayor's Committee on PWD, co-hosted the event. (Paige tried to convince me that she was former County Councilmember Brian De Lima's daughter instead of his wife, but her own two daughters were there, and they protested. They also told me their secret nicknames for their Mom.) Chris reports that the new Mayor's Committee includes, besides Paige as Chair and Wesley as Co-Chair, Laura Tobosa (also a DRH Officer), Jeani Navarro, James Dias Souza, Dr. Ron Wager-Wright, Jesslie Hook, and Dareth Pung-Boteilh.

It is a pleasure to see that some of the ADA's rules are finally appearing in the concrete structures of our environment, and in the behavior of our public officials, not just in speeches. The environment is much more accessible now that it was in 1990, when the ADA was signed, or in 1993 when DRH was incorporated. Still, there is a long way to go before our society is truly integrated. This became obvious as we listened to the conversations at the various agency tables. Many of the attendees were still searching for solutions to their own problems with disability discrimination. It will be a long time before these problems are solved.

The Mayor's Committee has set up an unofficial (i.e. not County controlled) web page. It is at [<http://cpdhawaii.ning.com/>] on the "Ning" social network site. A lot of important links are attached to that page, including articles on visitability. Unfortunately, the County's own web site is out of date regarding the Mayor's Committee's own PWD business. The most recent entry on that website: [<http://www.co.hawaii.hi.us/bc/copwd/main.htm>] is a blank agenda for an April 2011 meeting. So the new Committee is still getting organized. We're on their side, and we hope for more good things like the ADA Celebration.

..... NewsNotes .....

Educating the Airline Employees:

-- Ron Amundson had an adventure with the new Continental Airlines employees in Hilo. It is wonderful that we now have direct mainland connections to Hilo with Continental. But the local employees seem totally ignorant of the Air Carriers Access Act requirements. When Ron arrived

in Hilo from LAX recently, the employees refused to deliver Ron's wheelchair to the jetway. Ron explained the law (again and again) but the local director refused to have it done, claiming (falsely) that the Federal Security personnel would not allow the wheelchair back onto the airplane. Ron filed a complaint on the US Department of Transportation web site, at

<http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov>.

He received a quick reply from the Department of Transportation, and after about two weeks a very satisfying reply from Continental Airlines officials. They said that Ron was right and the Hilo Continental manager was wrong. (Duh. I knew that.) The satisfying reply did not change the fact that he was badly treated on his arrival. Ron will share this letter at our September meeting. We will put copies of the letter on the DRH web site, so other wheelchair users can carry it with them when they travel on Continental.

Chris Cholas experienced the very same violations of his rights in Honolulu recently, as discussed at previous DRH meetings. It is proven repeatedly that WE know what we are talking about, and that the airline employees are ignorant of the law. Still, it is depressing that we must spend so much time doing the job that the airlines themselves should be doing -- educating their employees.

-- News from Japan; the earthquake disaster from first hand.

Masayo Furui is a person with cerebral palsy who lives in Japan. Ron met her at a Society for Disability Studies conference in Washington DC. Masayo forwarded a link to her web site, where she describes the very disturbing events during the recovery from the 3/11 earthquake. She does not tell a happy story, and she does not ask for donations, but has a very unique perspective on the disaster. Her web site is <http://cp-research.jp/?lang=en>.