

Marion Stillson, Reston Citizen of the Year ceremony, Thursday, April 16, 2015.
Remarks by Ken Fredgren

Sridhar and other distinguished celebrants, I'm honored to be here this evening.

We don't often have the opportunity to give public praise and thanksgiving for someone we admire and respect, so Marion, I **relish** this opportunity.

I contracted the Polio virus in 1959, the effects of which evolved into Post-Polio Syndrome in the late 1990s. I was laboring along with a cane, and had become increasingly frustrated with the barriers to access that parking lots, parking spaces and entry doors presented to me. I knew I had a disability, but I knew absolutely nothing about **disability-rights**.

In the fall of 2007, serving as president of RCA, Marion sent an email to a list of Restonians. I was on that list. She asked if any of us would join her in a new RCA accessibility advocacy for persons with disabilities. It was like a door suddenly opened, and I responded immediately in the affirmative, sharing some of my accessibility frustrations. A group of us met in Marion's home in December, 2007, and Reston Accessibility Committee (RAC) was born.

Along with another mentor of mine in disability-rights advocacy, County staff member, Matt Barkley, Marion introduced me to "person-first language" such as the phrase "person with a mobility impairment," as opposed to "handicap," "handicapped," "disabled," "the disabled," and "wheelchair **bond**." (Considering the latter phrase, chains or ropes come to mind.)

I learned that the h-words, "handicap" and "handicapped," are pejoratives when used to describe a person.

I learned that a handicap is something outside of a person - for instance, a curb, a too-steep slope, a tiring distance, an unsafe route of travel, or an entry door that is too heavy or too narrow.

I learned the importance of correctly-worded accessible parking signs marking accessible parking spaces.

RAC's advocacy received a boost when, at Marion's request, Cathy Hudgins and Goldie Harrison met with Marion and me in February, 2009, in Cathy's conference room. Also there, at Cathy's invitation, were Audrey Clark and Donna Pesto of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services. The topic that day was the concept of including Visitability features when building new homes in the County. That meeting opened a new and continuing staff resource for information and advice with regard to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Virginia law and the Fairfax code.

On April 1, 2009, (no fooling) Marion and I met outside **this building** with the then Administrator of the Fellowship House; RCC Executive Director, Leila Gordon; and the then property manager for Hunters Woods Village Center. As a result of that cooperation, the two accessible parking spaces serving the front entrance to RCC and the strip of businesses from Buffalo Wing Factory to the then Dairy Queen became four, and last year, under new management, grew to five.

As a result of Marion's 2007 email outreach, RAC has completed **20 accessibility projects** by partnering with owners and property managers, ranging from North Point Village Center on the North to Fox Mill Center on the south, and from South Lakes Village Center on the east to Sunrise Technology Park on the west. There are four projects in progress, and two more will open soon.

We can't predict when a *seemingly* small action of ours – such as sharing an idea or sending an email - will sow the seeds that have an important, lasting and sometimes critical effect on a community. All the more reason to keep trying, keep sharing.

It is my honor to present RAC's Community Partner Award to Marion.
The citation message is:

Presented To
Marion B. Stillson
With gratitude

For sowing the seeds that led to the 2007 formation of
Reston Accessibility Committee,
For her unfailing advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities and
For her *generous* support of Reston Accessibility Committee.
Presented April 16, 2015