

Accessibility

BY KEN FREDGREN





PHOTO BY SEAN BAHRAMI

Ramps and signs make facilities accessible.

You're about to greet some new faces at a reception and you want to look your best. So you stop in the restroom to check your appearance. Only problem is that the lowest mirror is two feet above your head. "That could never happen," you say.

But this very incident occurred to a Reston community leader who just happens to be in a wheel chair. The mirror was hung to accommodate standing patrons. Afterwards, the mirror was re-hung so patrons in wheel chairs could easily access it.

However, there is still plenty to do so that more people become aware that accessibility is an issue for many people in Reston alone.

That's why the Reston Accessibility Committee (RAC) of Reston Citizens Association has been working for over two years to improve accessibility throughout the greater Reston community for persons with mobility disabilities. Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) being in force for 20 years this year, there are still many public accommodations and commercial facilities in Reston that are not barrier-free for customers, clients and patients, who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters, walkers or other assistive devices to access buildings by way of parking spaces.

Examples of successful Reston partnerships that RAC celebrates include:

- β The replacement of two dangerously-sloped curb ramps with properly-sloped ones at Sunrise Valley Center.
- β Two additional accessible parking spaces with an access aisle and several crosswalks at Hunters Woods Village Center.
- β Accessible spaces relocated to a safer location, corrected signage and creative crosswalks at Home Depot.
- β On-going improvements of accessible parking spaces, signage and entrance doors at Reston Corner.

RAC is always looking to bring understanding and improve access for our neighbors with mobility impairments. So the next time you want to check your appearance in a public restroom, just ask yourself, 'what if I were in a wheelchair or scooter?'

The RAC seeks to partner with owners and property managers in pursuit of one of Reston's seven declared goals, "That the importance and dignity of each individual be the focal point for all planning, and take precedence for large-scale concepts."

In reaching out to owners, businesses and their representatives, RAC members work to establish a spirit of good will, good faith and emphasis on the common good – the group's three Gs. RAC members would much rather work with an owner as a community partner than against him or her as an adversary.

There are community partners in Reston who support the RAC work in other ways. Examples include the United Bank at Reston Parkway and Temporary Road which provides the meeting room for RAC's bimonthly meetings. Reston Rotary Club, which hosts RAC's periodic presentations of its Universal Access Leadership award. Thompson Hospitality which prints the committee's brochures.



Ken Fredgren, chairman of RAC, and his wife, Kathy, moved to Reston in 2003 from Arlington. In late 2007, Ken accepted an invitation from Marion Stillson, president of Reston Citizens Association to help advocate for improved accessibility in Reston.

