

Q Could you describe the U.S. Access Board and its mission?

A I'd be glad to. Through its work developing guidelines and standards, the U.S. Access Board serves as a leading resource on accessible design. It was created 35 years ago to develop and enforce access requirements for federally funded facilities covered by the Architectural Barriers Act, one of the first laws on the books requiring access to the built environment. Over the years the board's mission has grown with the passage of other laws, most notably the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under the ADA the board gained responsibility for establishing guidelines for the wide range of facilities—as well as transportation vehicles—that are covered by the law. The board's work also encompasses access to information technology, and to telecommunications due to later laws. Besides developing design criteria and keeping them up to date, the board promotes accessible design through outreach, technical assistance, training, published resources, and sponsored research.

The board is structured to coordinate policy among federal agencies and to directly represent the public, particularly people with disabilities. Half of its 25 members represent departments of the federal government, with the other comprised of members of the public appointed by the President, and it is constantly developing or updating its guidelines and standards. A few years ago we completed a thorough update of our facility guidelines covering all types of facilities in the private and public sectors, including hotels and motels, airports, rail and bus stations, and many others. Several efforts are currently underway that will enhance access to transportation. The board has proceeded to review and update its ADA guidelines for transportation vehicles, which address access to buses, vans, rail cars, and other modes of public transportation. In addition, it is developing new guidelines for passenger vessels, including cruise and gaming ships, ferries, and excursion boats. The board also is undertaking an initiative to promote access at airports.

Q How about your own background?

A I graduated from the University of Wyoming with a bachelor's degree in textiles merchandising and interior design. I'd often thought about the implications of interior design on the lives of people with disabilities, and I've always known that I wanted to be involved with accessible design. After graduating I became active in the disability advocacy scene in Wyoming, working for the Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, and I also began advocating on behalf of people with disabilities during the legislative sessions. I was there for about four and a half years, and during that time I also became quite involved with Little People of America. I became a district director at the age of 23, was elected the senior vice president in 2004, and moved into the position of president just a few months into my term. In 2000 I became the organization's representative to the International Code Council/American National Standard Institute's A117.1 Committee on Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities, and it was there that I met some individuals who encouraged me to seek appointment to the Access Board. I was appointed to the board by President George W. Bush in 2005 as its youngest member, and in 2007 I became board chair at the age of 30.

Q You're a longtime advocate for people with disabilities. Any particular reason?

A Being someone with dwarfism and standing at three feet and two inches, I'm at the short end of the scale when it comes to little people. Not only can the height of things like towel dispensers, gas pumps, and ATM machines prove difficult, but I also use a scooter for long distances, so things like curb ramps, door widths, and elevators are essential elements of my daily activities.

But I think it really began when I was in the fourth grade and my class went on a field trip to a university campus. I'd just had surgery and was



using a wheelchair, so my mom drove me there and helped me get around campus. I remember arriving, and there was nowhere for us to park. The university had very few accessible parking spaces, and they were off limits if you didn't have a permit. By the time we'd parked and gained access through a back entrance and a service elevator my class was ready to move on to the next building, which meant that we had to start the process all over again. We spent the entire day chasing after them, and I didn't get to see anything. That day is emblazoned in my memory because it was the first time I'd witnessed my mom advocating on my behalf, and also when I really understood what it meant to not be able to access things like everyone else. At the same time, I simply wasn't raised to think of myself as having a disability. It wasn't that my parents thought that having a disability was a negative thing, it was just an inconsequential detail. But as I grew older the role of being an advocate for accessibility came naturally to me. For instance, when I was fighting to get an automatic door installed at my high school I realized that it wasn't just about me, but also for the benefit of other students in the future. That's the attitude I've always had—while I may be standing up for myself, I'm also standing up for everyone else who comes after me. *TM*

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