

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

**Gypsy Rose, Miniature
Therapy Horse
featured in an
educational event the
COD sponsored at the
Library during October
Accessibility
Awareness Month**



In 2016 the commission undertook projects, provided advice to town organizations, and carried out myriad tasks, all designed to support the ultimate goals of identifying problems and providing solutions, for Lancaster residents with disabilities. The commission continues to strive to make the community more accessible to those who are mobility impaired and/ or have other disabilities.

The COD made significant efforts in the first half of the year on accessibility at Bigelow Gardens (BG), raising awareness to town officials on the needs of their residents who are seniors/ elderly. In addition, the COD consulted the Lancaster Housing Authority (BG) board and the tenants association on projects such as curb cuts, which were installed in June by a contractor BG awarded.

Highlights of the year also included The October Lancaster Accessibility Awareness Month program. The Accessibility Awareness program was developed by the COD in 2014 to create more exposure to all town citizens on the subject, with the ultimate goal in mind of helping disabled residents in Lancaster live more full and productive lives with dignity.

Activities for Accessibility Awareness Month, which the town has officially declared, included a COD exhibit booth with information at the Horse Shed Fair on October 1st. On hand

in the booth was APAW (American Poodles At Work) , who provided enjoyable, unique demonstrations on how certain poodles function wonderfully as service dogs for disabled people. Also during the month, an enjoyable, informative, well attended event starring “Gypsy Gold”, a miniature therapy horse trained to assist disabled people, was presented at the Lancaster Public Library on October 19th. During October the Library in collaboration with the COD, also featured a month-long special book display for children and adults. In addition, the TML website highlighted a unique, educational timeline display on the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The COD also exhibited at the Wellness Fair held at The Lancaster Community Center on Oct 5th. The events were covered by local and regional media, which in turn generated exposure and awareness on accessibility, and educate our community on the needs of people with disabilities. The COD also continued its participation in the “Complete Streets” study being done by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission to determine what improvements Lancaster needs for sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, roadways, parking and public gathering places. The COD put in a strong effort to make Lancaster’s third annual Accessibility Awareness Month a success.

In 2016 the COD identified and contacted certain public establishments and businesses that needed to meet compliance per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Massachusetts Office on Disability requirements. In addition, the COD continues to expand outreach efforts to identify more

extensively, businesses and public facilities in need of improvement and /or updates to meet the aforementioned compliance.

During the year the COD engaged the Lancaster Boy Scouts organization to participate in community service outreach efforts to observe/ identify such places that may need to meet accessibility needs. The Scouts kindly agreed to participate and were briefed by the COD on ADA guidelines, which was both educational for the troop, helpful for the COD and the community.

In 2016 the COD has monitored, worked with and advised town organizations on accessibility for numerous projects such as the Prescott Building Renovation and the Thayer Field Recreation Campus and efforts to make the Town Beach accessible, just to name a few. The COD is still fully engaged on these current projects/ initiatives. The COD also participated in the Lancaster Trail and Bikeway Coalition efforts, to observe and advise as needed, on trail accessibility per ADA and USDA park guidelines and/ or requirements, where and when applicable.

The COD has also been evaluating Emergency Preparation for the Disabled. This is an area in need of being addressed not only in Lancaster, but regionally, as well as at state and national levels. Communication and instructions on what disabled residents need to do in the event of an emergency are either nonexistent or sketchy and are generally inadequate. We are endeavoring to improve communication tools for the benefit of both Lancaster residents and for the Massachusetts Office on Disability (M.O.D.) so that the entire state may benefit as well.

Regarding the M.O.D., some COD members also participate in state or regional events hosted by the M.O.D. or other worthwhile entities sponsoring events on accessibility. In September, the Abilities Expo in Boston was attended to inform and educate individuals or groups such as our COD on trends, technologically advanced mobility devices and share with other peers, developments and efforts to improve the lives of the disabled.

The Lancaster COD, as evidenced by the aforementioned initiatives and efforts, is a vibrant commission that ultimately enhances the lives of residents and visitors, especially those with disabilities, at almost no cost due to the collective efforts of dedicated volunteers who staff the commission. In a state where over half of the communities do not even have an organized disability commission, Lancaster is playing a progressive role in this area that the town can be proud of.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael S. McCue

Chairman, Lancaster COD