

THE INDEPENDENCE TIMES

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Finding Freedom in the Strangest of Places – Tim’s Scuba Adventure



Tim Ashley at a recent scuba diving class with Adaptive Adventures

Imagine being weightless, floating effortlessly with your head beneath the water in an environment alien to the one you know. You can hear the bubbles breaking on the surface as you observe your new surroundings. That’s how it was for Tim Ashley in an experience he could only describe as “just liberating”. For most people, scuba diving is an exciting and novel escape from the world they’re used to, and a way to experience life beneath the waves. For Tim, who is a Peer Support Coordinator at The Independence Center, scuba diving took on a whole new meaning in a recent trip to Denver. Earlier in his life, Tim had an accident on a construction site that resulted in paralysis that left him unable to use his legs. Today, Tim uses a wheelchair to get around. During a recent scuba diving excursion, Tim experienced life from a whole new perspective.

When discussing how he became interested in scuba diving, Tim enthusiastically says “I’ve wanted to scuba dive ever since I was a little kid. I just never had the opportunity to do it.” So when Adaptive Adventures, an organization that organizes recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, posted the scuba class on their website calendar, Tim jumped at the opportunity. He called up and registered as soon as he could. He had gone on several excursions with Adaptive Adventures as part of his Spinal Cord Injury peer support group in the past, so the process was pretty simple.

Not long after, the big day came and Tim found himself at the edge of an indoor pool in south Denver getting ready to take the plunge. Looking in, he was nervous about what might happen when he hit the water. With the air tank attached to his back, he thought its weight might roll him over in the water where he wouldn’t be able to turn himself back around. When the time came, he didn’t hesitate for a moment. He hit the water with a splash and sank in. As his body settled in the water, he realized

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CEO CORNER

Patricia Yeager, Ph.D., CEO

New Law to Tackle Fraudulent Service Animals

As CEO of an organization that advocates for and works with people with disabilities on a daily basis, I believe that the new service animal law makes progress in protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

Businesses have an opportunity to create safer environments for all parties, now that a new Colorado law passed deters false service animals.

Misrepresenting your ordinary animal as a service animal is, in essence, stealing another person's benefits and rights. "It's comparable to parking in an accessible parking spot or buying a fake disability placard because it's more convenient for you, when there is someone else who legitimately needs that spot," says Paul O'Brien, Director of the Colorado Satellite of Canine Companions for Independence.

Some people who bring fake service animals in public are fraudulently claiming to have disabilities, while others may just be unclear

about the legal difference between service animals and emotional support animals.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as a dog or miniature horse that is specially trained to perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Emotional support animals (also called companion animals) provide companionship and help relieve depression, anxiety, or phobias, but they do not have special training to perform tasks. As a result, under the new law, people who have disabilities and rely on emotional support animal can be assessed fines when falsely claiming their animal as a service animal.

Untrained animals can be disruptive to businesses and have even been known to attack legitimate service animals.

Local businesses can create a welcoming environment for all parties by taking a few simple actions. Post service animal signage on outer doors, keep animal guidelines easily available, and train staff to know the two questions they can legally ask someone with an animal: 1) Is this service dog required because of a disability? 2) What task has the animal been trained to perform?

With a little knowledge and understanding, everyone can help to make the world a more accessible place for people with disabilities.

For more information about service animals, visit our service animals information page at <http://bit.ly/ServiceAnimal> or contact The Independence Center at 719-471-8181.



THE IC GETS A NEW BUILDING TO ADDRESS GROWTH

Its official, The Independence Center (The IC) is the proud new owner of 711 South Tejon Street. The building, which is directly next door to our main building, will be the new home for our CNA Training Program and our Home Health department. Throughout the last few years, The IC has undergone an incredible growth-spurt, which has brought about an increasing need for office space. When the opportunity to purchase a building adjacent to our existing location arose, the decision was obvious. We jumped on the opportunity, and the real work began. At a whopping 12,000 square feet, the space will provide the room necessary for the growth that is anticipated over the coming years.



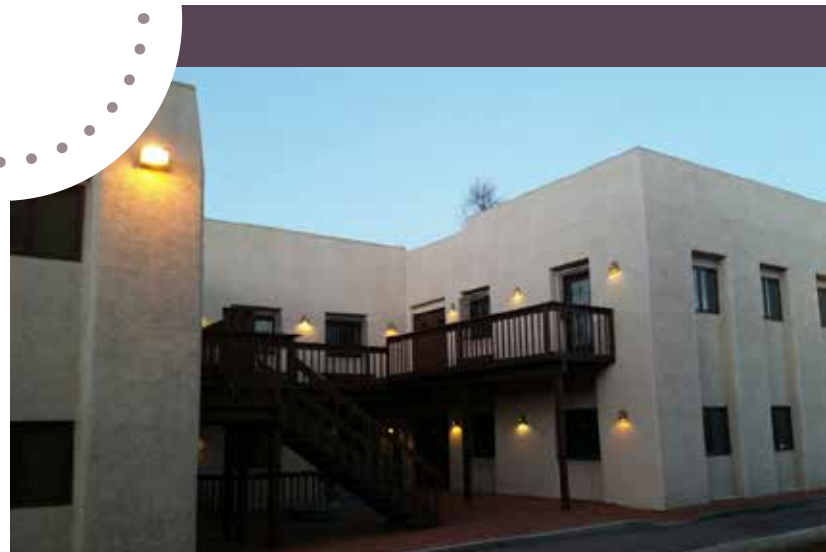
Front of the new building with main building in background

In the early to mid-part of 2018, the building will undergo some minor updates in order to meet the immediate needs of the CNA Training Program and the Home Health department. With good reason, everyone involved seems thoroughly excited by the prospect of the new building. In the not so distant future, the building will most certainly need to receive an extensive remodeling. The current configuration is quite compartmental and a little maze-like, which isn't ideal for accessibility. This will most certainly need to change.



New building from The IC parking lot

In short order, The IC will be conducting a capital campaign, which will allow us to remodel the space. The plan is to redesign the building to be a model of accessibility similar to our main building. With a little luck, the remodel could happen in 2019, but for now, we're happy to have such a great new building. If you would like to learn more about The IC, visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/AboutTheIC>.



Side entry of the new building

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



SEASONAL TIPS

1 2 3 4 5

The Pikes Peak region is notorious for its unpredictable weather patterns and long winters. It isn't unheard of to have t-shirt weather one day followed by a blizzard the next. Don't be caught off guard when inclement weather strikes. The following tips from The Independence Center's Emergency Preparedness department will help you prepare.

Winter storms can occur through early June in Colorado. Ensure you have a car kit with adequate supplies in your vehicle and keep your gas tank above half full at all times.

As the snow melts and temperatures warm, an increased risk of flash floods can occur throughout the state. Stay up-to-date on weather information in your area and remember - turn around, don't drown!

If drought conditions continue, dry vegetation increases the likelihood of wildfires. While Spring can be our wettest season, please keep wildfire safety in mind and be careful with open flames.

Spring is a prime time for high winds, rapidly changing weather conditions, winter storms, thunder storms, floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. Know where to find weather information and plan accordingly.

A standard emergency kit should include food, water, clothing, bedding, tools, a first aid kit, and important documents such as contact information, medical information, and others. Check out The Independence Center website for more details on kit items and how to prepare a disaster kit at <http://bit.ly/theicemergencyprep>.

PHOTOVOICE PROJECT - CREATING CHANGE THROUGH CREATIVITY

In an ambitious new project, The Independence Center's Jamie Muth hopes to shed light on those things in the daily lives of people with disabilities which promote an accessible and inclusive space, versus those that do not. The idea is for people with disabilities to document through photography and writing, the issues that they encounter which create barriers to an accessible and inclusive space. And on the flip-side, to document those things that help to remove barriers. Examples of negative issues could include things like curbs without curb cuts or the lack of ASL interpreters at a doctor's office. A few positive examples could include photos demonstrating strong social bonds or disability-friendly policies at your local library. There could be any number of issues, but most will likely be very personal to each individual. The IC will provide disposable cameras, provided by

Cottonwood Center for the Arts as well as prints and framing which will be donated by Mike's Camera.

Along with a written narrative from the photographer, the photos will serve as an authoritative witness of points of friction in the author's life. The hope of Photovoice is to create a catalyst that leads to meaningful change through creative expression. After participants have finished with their photo essays, the projects will be exhibited at an event on Friday, July 6th. The issues identified by the project, will bring about awareness, and create changes to systems that aren't working for people with disabilities. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in Photovoice, please contact The IC's Jamie Muth for more information at jmuth@the-ic.org. To learn more about advocacy at The Independence Center, visit <http://bit.ly/PhotoVoiceAdvocacy>



EL PASO COUNTY RECEIVES NATIONAL VOTING AWARD FOR WORK WITH THE IC



People voting at The IC in the 2016 election

On November 29th, the El Paso County election department received the Clearie award from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, for their work with The Independence Center during the 2016 general election. Before the election, the El Paso County Clerk and Records Office in partnership with The IC, provided training to people with disabilities in the use of accessible voting machines. The IC then served as a highly accessible voter polling location during the election.

This award is the second award presented to El Paso County related to their work with The IC during the 2016 election season. This truly is a great accomplishment in advancing the voting rights of people with disabilities in El Paso County, and we are grateful for our partnership with the Clerk and Records Office. If you would like more information about voting in Colorado Springs, visit our Voting Information webpage at <http://bit.ly/TheICVote>

News. (2017, November 29). Retrieved February 06, 2018, from <https://www.eac.gov/news/2017/11/29/colorados-el-paso-county-election-department-clearie-award/>

Finding Freedom in the Strangest of Places – Tim's Scuba Adventure

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that his initial concern was unfounded. Immediately, he felt at home. Over the next few hours, he swam in the pool as if he were weightless. When I ask him what the experience was like, he says "It's just amazing." When diving, "the wheelchair doesn't exist, and the disability doesn't exist. It just disappears. It's a feeling of total freedom." When elaborating on the experience, he says "It's like I came out of the person that's sitting in the wheelchair and I was the person that I used to be." It's obvious that his time underwater made quite an impression.

The experience was so impactful, in fact that Tim has signed up to become certified in scuba diving. If all goes well, Tim, a hand full of people from his scuba class, and Adaptive Adventures staff will take a trip to Mexico in the near future to go scuba diving in the Gulf of Mexico. He seems ecstatic about the prospect of swimming in the open ocean.

To learn more about the peer support groups at The Independence Center, or to speak to Tim Ashley about recreational opportunities through Adaptive Adventures, give us a call at 719-471-8181 or on the web at <http://bit.ly/2wpdnhZ>

IC EMPLOYEE RECEIVES AWARD FOR EMPLOYMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS



In a recent award ceremony at the Colorado State Capital, along with several other recipients, The Independence Center's Mathew Morris was presented with the Shining Stars award. The Shining Stars award was started this year as a way to recognize individuals and businesses for their employment related accomplishments and inclusive hiring practices related to people with disabilities. In Mathew's case, he was presented with the award for his work ethic and independence while working with Vocational Rehabilitation to identify, interview for, and retain permanent employment. After the award ceremony, the awardees had the opportunity to meet with Governor John Hickenlooper for quick meet and greet. This is a well-deserved award to a great person.


At The Independence Center, Mathew works in the Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) department, where he leads support groups, teaches Braille, provides training on adaptive technology, and conducts home visits to evaluate and optimize the homes of people who are losing their vision.



Mathew Morris presented Shining Stars award at the State Capital

OLDER INDIVIDUALS WITH BLINDNESS

Though The IC serves people with low vision and blindness of all ages, the Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) program serves a special role in helping people over the age of 55. As we age, the majority of us have some form of age-related vision changes. This is a normal part of life, but adapting to the new normal can be difficult for individuals experiencing more serious vision loss. This is where OIB comes in. OIB is operated by individuals who are themselves, experiencing low vision or blindness. OIB provides services that help to restore independence and build confidence in day-to-day life. To learn more about The IC's low vision and blindness related programs, visit us at <http://bit.ly/oibgroups>.



Governor Hickenlooper Welcomes Recipients of Shining Stars of VR Awards. (n.d.). Retrieved February 06, 2018, from <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdle/news/governor-hickenlooper-welcomes-recipients-shining-stars-vr-awards>

SPREADING AWARENESS THROUGH ADVERTISING

If you aren't familiar with The Independence Center (The IC), you may have seen our billboard or bus ads around town and wondered what exactly it is that we do. The Independence Center is a local nonprofit organization that provides traditional and self-directed home health care, independent living, and advocacy services for people with disabilities. Put simply, we help people with disabilities remain independent within their home and community through our various programs.

The IC's home health department provides a range of services to consumers including skilled nursing, in-home support services, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. With over two hundred employees in The IC's home health department, this is by far the largest department. People are often surprised to hear that most of The IC's paid caregivers are actually the loved-ones and caregivers for family members with a disability. This is possible because of a change to Colorado law in 2016

affecting In Home Support Services (IHSS). The program has proven life-changing for the individuals that take advantage of the benefit. Since the law began, The IC has hired qualifying individuals through the Home Health department and trained and certified many individuals through The Independence Center CNA Training Program.

Another department at The IC is our Center for Independent Living (CIL). The CIL provides a host of services that enable people with disabilities to remain independently in their home if that's what they desire. Services are provided in the form of peer support, skills classes, transition services, employment, home modifications, assistive technologies, and benefits. Many Home Health consumers rely on services provided by the CIL.

If you, or a loved one, could use any of these services, reach out to us at <http://bit.ly/TheIndependenceCenter>.

