

The Voice

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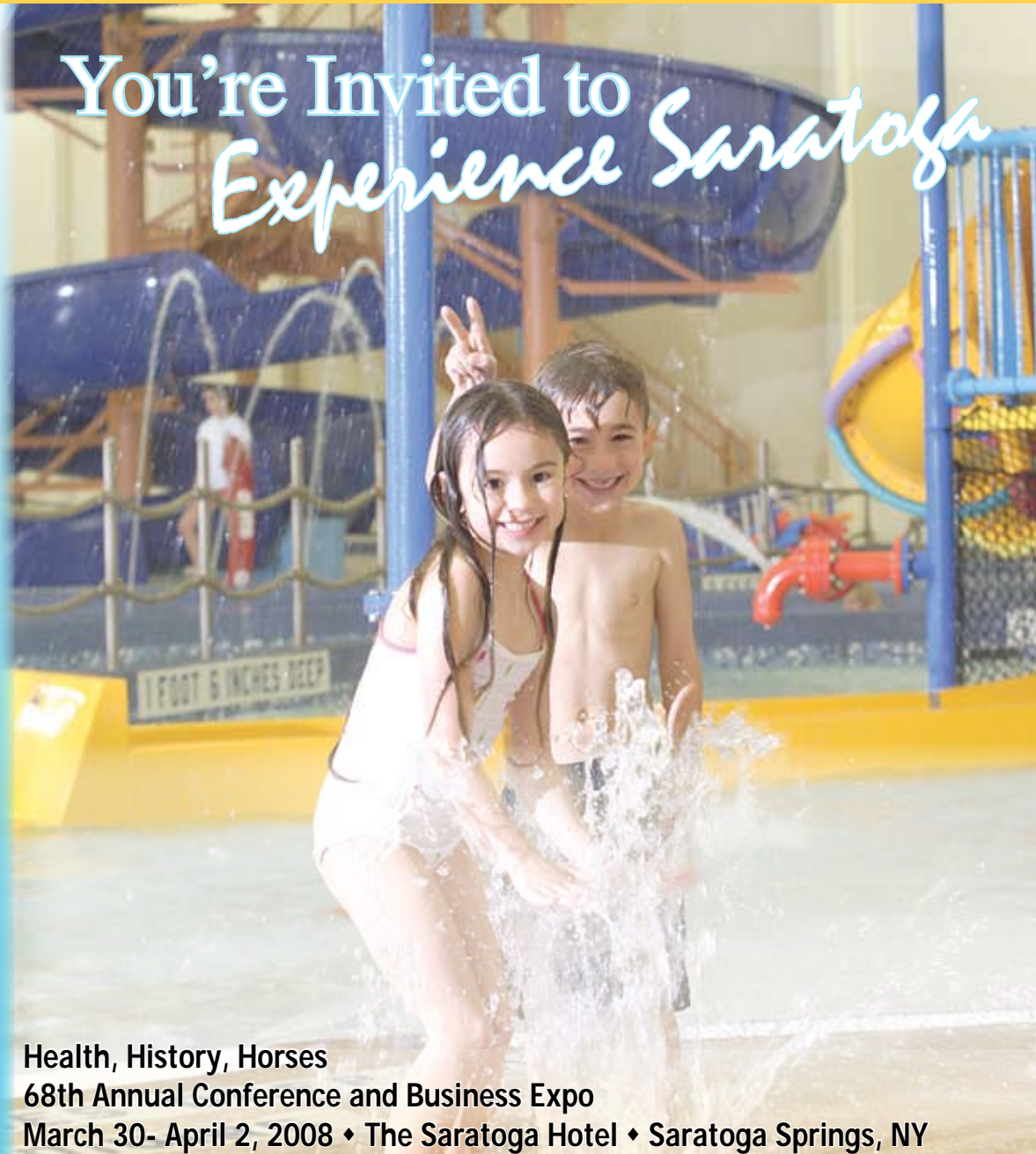
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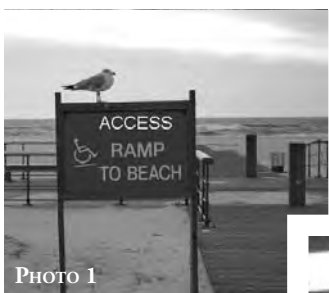


PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2



PHOTO 4

ACCESSIBLE INCLUSIVE AQUATICS

Swimming is one of the most popular recreation activities in the United States. Throw in waterskiing, sailing, boating, windsurfing, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting, sun-bathing at the beach, and a myriad of other water and beach-based activities, and it is highly likely that every American does at least one recreation activity in the list on a regular basis. Well, almost everyone. People with disabilities may have difficulty accessing aquatic environments, facilities, and programs. Ironically, swimming and other water sports are highly beneficial for people with disabilities, with many well-researched benefits. Here are some tips to make your aquatic areas and programs inclusive and accessible for all.

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

- Make sure there is a level, firm, and barrier-free surface to enter the pool or beach area.

- For beaches:
 - A wooden boardwalk is often used (see photo 1). If you do not have a boardwalk or sidewalk to the water, you can use a portable roll-out surface like “Mobimat” or plastic snow fencing.
 - Have a beach wheelchair available for loan if your beach area is sandy or has an unstable surface. Clearly post that you have the beach wheelchair available (see photo 2).
- For docks or fishing piers:
 - Make sure you have a 2” edge protection around the dock. Edge protection is a curb that prevents wheelchairs or other mobility devices from slipping off the dock or fishing pier.
 - Have one section of the edge protection removable, so that someone can transfer from the dock to a canoe or kayak (see photo 3).
 - If the end of the dock has a fold-out ramp, someone in a wheelchair can board a pontoon from the dock independently (see photo 4).

- For swimming pools
 - There are several ways to facilitate easy entry for a person with a disability into the pool, depending on functional ability. One method is a lift that allows transfer from a wheelchair to the chair on the lift, that lowers into the water (see photo 5- next page).
 - Another method of entry is a transfer platform, which allows someone to transfer down steps into the pool (see photo 6- next page).
 - An ideal situation is a zero-depth entry pool. If you are ever in a position to install a new pool in your town or facility, consider this universally designed pool, which is fun and easy to use by all people, not just people with disabilities! (see photo 7- next page). Whatever method you choose, be aware that it is your responsibility to provide access to all people to be able to use your pool.
 - If it is possible, keep the pool water temperature above 80 degrees, to be comfortable for children and older adults,

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PHOTO 5

and to ease movement for people with certain disabilities.

- Make sure the locker rooms or changing areas have an accessible door to enter (at least 32" with opening force less than 5 lbs.). There should be a clear route of travel from the door to easily opened lockers to showers and then to the pool or beach.

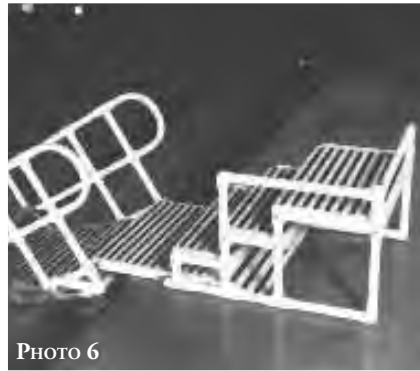


PHOTO 6

- Have at least one shower with a bench or chair, grab bars, and a hand-held shower unit.

**P R O G R A M
I N C L U S I O N**

- Provide aquatic staff training on disability awareness and

inclusion strategies, such as activity and equipment adaptation, positive behavioral supports, and other topics. Hire staff that are comfortable with people with differences, and are positive about inclusion. (photo 8- next page)

- Make sure all your aquatic staff knows how

to operate any pool lifts or pool entry methods you have available.

- For any aquatic programs, have a section on the registration form where people can identify any specific needs they may have to participate in the program. Follow up with a phone call or interview to find out as much as you can to help accommodate the person in your swim program.

• There is a wealth of adapted equipment available to assist people with disabilities in the water. Equipment ranges from pool chairs, to specialized personal floatation devices, to balance aids. A good source to research adapted equipment is www.abledata.com.

• Activity adaptation and partial participation allow swimmers with a significant disability to participate in the parts of the swim activity they can do, or in a different way. For example, allowing a child with a significant disability to swim laps with a personal floatation device will allow the child to swim with his or her peers.

• Have a designated quiet area near the pool. The pool environment is noisy and distracting, and someone who has difficulty integrating stimuli in such an environment may need a quiet place to regroup or relax for a short period.

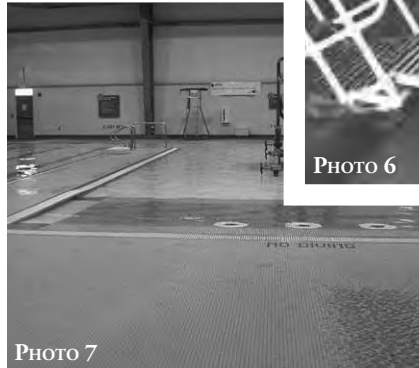


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ADMINISTRATIVE INCLUSION

- Market your aquatic programs and facilities to people with disabilities. Let them know what you have available to help them participate. If people know you are ready to include them, they will come!
- When doing any new construction or renovations, include people with disabilities in the planning, to make things are accessible from the initial phases of the aquatics project.
- Make sure you have policies and procedures in place for emergency evacuation of people with disabilities from the aquatic environment.
- Determine what your agency policy will be on personal care attendants. Many agencies allow personal care attendants to attend free with the person with a disability, as the attendant is solely there to assist.
- Decide how you will accommodate service dogs/animals in the aquatics environment. Make sure all your staff knows the policy.

These tips touch on just a few of the many things you can do to make aquatics accessible and inclusive. The NYS Inclusive Recreation Resource Center has specialty checklists for swimming pools, whirlpools, beaches, and fishing piers, if you want more specific and detailed information about physical accessibility in aquatic environments. We are available to



PHOTO 8

provide technical assistance as you make your aquatic programs, administrative practices, and environments available to all citizens. Feel free to contact us at InclusiveRec@ Cortland.edu or 607-753-4833. Or visit us on the web at www.cortland.edu/nysirrc.

By: Dr. Lynn Anderson, SUNY Cortland, NYS IRRC



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