

The Voice

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HIGHLIGHTS

**67th Annual Conference
& Business Expo**

**Preview
Page 6**

**Recreation Inclusion
Center at SUNY Cortland
page 25**

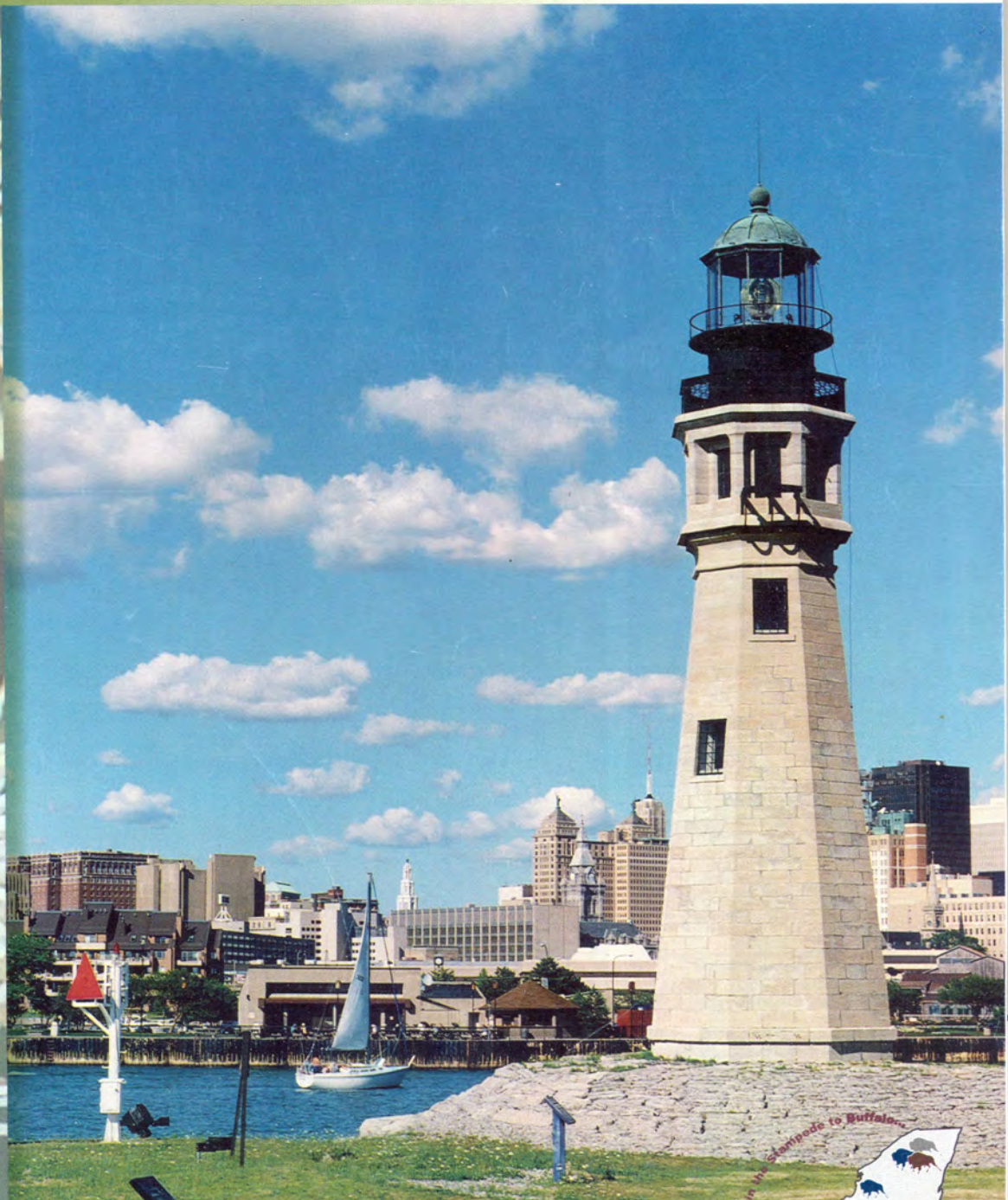
**New York State
Commissioners of
Interest
page 28**

**Love Those Dog Parks
Page 35**

ALSO...

**Ticket Consignment
Information
Page 37**

**Call for Program
Proposals- Downstate &
2008 Annual Conference
Page 40**



NYSRPS, Inc.
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Join the Stampede to Buffalo... Explore the Recreation Frontier
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New Partners, New Resources!

The Development of a State-Wide Inclusive Recreation Resource Center at SUNY Cortland

Dr. Lynn Anderson, CTRS, CPRP

The New York State Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities has awarded SUNY Cortland Recreation and Leisure Studies Department a substantial and renewable grant to establish a statewide resource center for inclusive recreation. The grant, which began this January, supports the work of the Center in several ways. New York State Recreation and Park Society was instrumental in helping secure the grant, and is a partnering organization with the Center. According to Gia Lemerise, Executive Director of NYSRPS, "As a statewide representative of park, recreation and leisure service professionals, who strive to improve the quality of life of New York's citizens, I am aware of the great necessity for the resources to be made available through this project. Through our member base of over 1,000 recreation providers, the NYSRPS is eager to assist SUNY Cortland with establishment of relationships to work toward the development and implementation of the Center."

What is the mission of the Center?

The mission of the Center is to promote and sustain participation by people with disabilities in inclusive recreation activities and resources throughout the state. The mission is achieved through: 1) educating and involving recreation and parks students in best practices in inclusive recreation, so that these future professionals know how to make recreation services and facilities inclusive as the norm; 2) developing collaborative and ongoing relationships with self advocates with disabilities, local and state recreation agencies to initiate systems change around inclusion that is sustainable and relevant; 3) assessing the availability of inclusive and accessible recreation opportunities in the state with rigorous tools and protocols, and cataloging the results in a user friendly, sustainable online database, in collaboration with other recreation agencies; 4) developing and sustaining a referral service that helps people with disabilities and their families find services and facilities for the recreation activities they desire, and

assisting them in accessing those resources; 5) providing technical assistance to recreation and park providers to help them move toward more inclusive models of recreation service delivery; and, 6) carefully studying and documenting, through a rigorous evaluation design, best practices in improving inclusion in recreation for people with disabilities, then disseminating those practices throughout New York State and beyond.

Who is the staff of the Center?

Dr. Lynn Anderson is the project director, and Dr. Susan Wilson and Dr. Vicki Wilkins are project faculty. We are extremely excited to welcome Laurie Penney McGee, CTRS, as the full-time project coordinator. Laurie, who has her master's degree in recreation/therapeutic recreation from SUNY Cortland, has worked in parks, recreation, and inclusion for many years, and is an extremely valuable asset to the Center. In addition, we have two bright and eager graduate assistants, both masters' students in therapeutic recreation, Jacqueline Johnston and Melissa Roeder. By summer, we will also have at least one full-time student intern working with the Center each semester. It is an enthusiastic, passionate, knowledgeable, and fun staff!

What services will the Center provide?

Accessibility surveys: The Center is developing a user-friendly tool to help programs and facilities assess both physical and programmatic inclusion. The tool will be piloted this spring, and put to use in the Long Island and Catskills regions over the next year. It will eventually be a web-based tool, available to any trained individual to complete recreation accessibility surveys around the state.

Training: The Center will initially provide face-to-face training to parks and recreation professionals, self-advocates, tourism professionals, human services professionals, families, and anyone interested in increasing opportunities for inclusive recreation in the state. Our focus in the first year will be in the Catskills and Long Island regions. The second

year, we will focus on the Thousand Island and Adirondack regions. Eventually, the training will also be web-based and available on demand to any interested individual. Once individuals have completed the training, either online or face-to-face, they will be able to complete accessibility surveys and enter results in an online recreation access database.

Online database for inclusive recreation:

Any programs or facilities that are assessed using the accessibility survey will be entered into an extensive online database. The database will align with the "I Love NY" tourism regions, and eventually be linked from that web site and many others. The database will be a comprehensive bank of information, sorted by region, on how inclusive and accessible recreation resources are around the state. An individual with a disability will be able to search for information to plan recreation experiences. The database will cover any and all programs and sites for recreation, from state and local parks, to youth bureau programs, to national seashores. Although we will initially focus on the most popular sites and programs in a region, once many people are trained to do the accessibility survey, more and more resources can be added to the online database. The format will be very similar to "Wikipedia," with grassroots entry of information on recreation accessibility around the state. Only those who have been certified to enter data, earned by completing the online or face-to-face training, will have the ability to enter accessibility information in the online database, so that the accuracy of the information can be controlled.

Technical assistance: Anyone providing parks and recreation services can contact the Center for assistance in improving program or facility accessibility. The staff is available to help individual agencies as they work to increase inclusion of people with disabilities and other differences into their parks, programs, or facilities.

Partnership development: The Center is working in several regions of the state

to solidify partnerships between parks and recreation, disability groups, and other interested groups to promote full inclusion in recreation on a regional basis. Regional Advisory Committees will be formed, and Regional Action Plans developed.

1:1 matching and referral service: Project staff will assist participants with a disability in identifying their recreation interests and goals, exploring and choosing community recreation resources, and working with identified programs, areas, or services on full inclusion. Referral and matching may be a simple email exchange or perhaps a phone conversation, or it may take the form of an in-depth interaction, depending on the needs of the individual with a disability. The key to making the matching and referral service successful is the individual humanistic design elements of assessment, goal-setting, advocacy and support for people with disabilities as they learn to navigate and use information and opportunities available and fulfill their dreams for recreation.

Research and evaluation: Central to the Center's work will be careful study of what works best to facilitate inclusion. We will collect data throughout the grant period to help inform us of the best ways to help parks and recreation opportunities be inclusive, and to help people with disabilities achieve their "recreation dreams and aspirations."

To help us with the initial work of developing the Center and all its activities, we are conducting focus groups with parks and recreation professionals, self-advocates, families of people with disabilities, and others. We hope that you will attend a focus group and share your thoughts with us about what the Center could do to be most helpful to you. From the focus groups, we also want to find a name for our new Center. We are currently calling it the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (IRRC), and are looking for a shorter, catchier name. Please feel free to share your ideas! Just send them to andersonL@cortland.edu.

We are excited to work closely with

NYSRPS members over the next three years and beyond. New York is fortunate to have a Developmental Disabilities Planning Council that values recreation so highly, and is putting resources into making sure that ALL people in the state can access our beautiful parks, wonderful programs, and excellent facilities. Feel free to contact us and share your interest, your ideas, and any thoughts you may have.

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Left to right: Dr. Susan Wilson, CTRS, Laurie Penney McGee, CTRS, Dr. Lynn Anderson, CTRS, Melissa Roeder, and Jacqueline Johnston

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