

ODC News

Newsletter of the Old Dominion Chapter of
the National Spinal Cord Injury Association
P.O. Box 8326 Richmond, VA 23226
(804) 726-4990
www.odncscia.org

December 2006

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Vice President: Craig Fabian
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Matthew Deans
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Jason Blackwell

Annual Holiday Party December 12th, 2006

5:30 - 9PM

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital
5700 Fitzhugh Avenue
Richmond, VA 23226

Please come out and share some Holiday cheer! We outgrew my house with the number of attendees last year, so this year our gathering will be in the ADL room at HealthSouth. Please come for the entire time or stop by as you are able. The chapter will provide the beverages and flatware but we are again asking those that are able to please bring a covered dish to share. I look forward to seeing many of you on the 12th. For those who are not able to make it, please have a safe, healthy and happy holiday season.

The New Year will bring many changes to the Chapter as well as to me personally. For those of you who may not be aware, with mixed emotions, I gave notice to the chapter's board in October that I would be stepping down as Executive Director of the Old Dominion Chapter effective December 31st. This is to allow me and my wife Jennifer to prepare for the arrival of our twins (a son and a daughter) sometime in February when I will assume the job of full-time, stay-at-home dad. While I will not be as involved in the day-to-day operation of the chapter, I will still be as active as I can as a member.

The board has decided not to immediately fill the role of Executive Director, but rather to hire a part-time Administrative Coordinator and have the board members take a more active role in many areas. However, they cannot do it all on their own. They have formed several committees and are asking those of you who may have an interest in one of the areas to please get in touch to share your time and talents. Please see the job announcement and committee listings on page 9 and seriously consider becoming a more active part of your chapter!

Many of you received an email recently outlining our participation in the Benevolink program. We have included another message on page 4. This year the Benevolink program will become an integral part of our how we pay for our chapter's programs and activities. Please be sure to read through the information, visit the Benevolink website and encourage your friends and family to register as well. It costs you and them nothing and will provide much needed funds for the chapter. If they have any question, Benevolink is happy to answer them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve as your Director. In time I am sure that I will be back taking a more active role in the association. For now, please keep me and my family in your thoughts and prayers. I wish you all the best and the happiest of Holiday seasons!

Shawn Floyd

President's Column

I would like to thank all of you for your continued support of and involvement in ODC / NSCIA. The past few years have brought us growth and opportunities. We have had two successful golf marathons, sponsored well-reviewed and attended ADA 101 training, and implemented quality of life grants to our members - just to name a few events and programs. In large part, this success has been due to the passion and commitment of a few individuals – most notably Shawn Floyd and Quincy Umphlette. These two people have provided the guidance, vision and leadership to sustain and grow the Chapter.

As with any organization, though, it is important that we move beyond being a one-man (or a one-woman) operation, assess where we are, and begin to plan for the future. We are fortunate to be blessed with a mission that we can believe in – to enable people with spinal cord injuries and disease (SCI / D) to achieve their highest level of health, independence, and quality of life – as well as a committed Board and people who share and are willing to support our vision. The question or issue then becomes, how do we focus the energy and resources of the chapter (the most important of which is its members) to achieve our goals?

The Board of Directors held a retreat in October to consider just those issues. At that event, the Board considered where we are, where we want to be, and how we will get there. Based on that retreat, we have developed a three- stage plan for focusing our resources so as to best engage our membership, meet their needs, and fulfill our mission. I encourage your feedback and comments about this plan and your participation in future activities as both attendees and committee members.

- *Stage 1: Focus on internal structure and activities:* The Chapter's energy and resources will be devoted to establishing consistent and high-quality programs to engage and meet the needs of members and individuals with SCI/D in our community. The Mentor Program will be a primary focus of the organization's attention so that we can get it implemented, begin training mentors, and providing services. We will also be restructuring monthly meetings around a presentation, specific focus / topic, or a social / recreational activity. Finally, fund-raising must be considered in order to maintain the organization.
- *Stage 2: Focus on External Connections, Education, and Collaborations:* In the second stage, ODC/ NSCIA's attention, energy and resources will be on conducting outreach, advocacy and marketing activities. In this stage, we know we are able to provide consistent programs and resources to the community and can begin to market and advertise these. We will put our focus into achieving name recognition and grass-roots efforts to make positive changes in the community – such as educating groups about the ADA, increasing accessibility and advocating for improved services. Existing activities that will continue (but not become a focus of the chapter's energy / resources) are community presentations, taskforce membership and voting training.
- *Stage 3: Focus on Expansion:* Not until we are able to do our core functions consistently and well will we concentrate the chapter's resources on expanding beyond the Greater Richmond area. We are, though, open to allowing other groups with an interest and motivation to provide support groups or activities to operate under the Chapter's banner.

** It should be noted that activities outside of a specific stage may be done at any time, though the chapter (as a whole) may not devote a great deal of energy or resources to those activities. However, individuals and members are always welcome to implement or take on specific duties, tasks or projects that interest them.

As mentioned earlier in the newsletter, committees will be a key part of accomplishing our objectives. More information about these can be found on page 9. I urge your participation on at least one committee – it will be a great way to get involved and meet people!

Finally, I would also like to encourage your attendance at the Holiday Social on December 12th at Health South Rehabilitation Hospital. Please stop by to meet the Board Members and to wish Shawn good luck with his upcoming fatherhood, or plan to stay to socialize. It is a great way to get into the holiday spirit!

Most of all though, have a safe, happy and healthy holiday season!

Michelle Meade, President, ODC / NSCIA

2006 Spinal Cord Injury Hall of Fame Inductees Honored at Kennedy Center Gala

Bethesda, MD – Fourteen of the best and brightest in the spinal cord injury (SCI) community were honored at the second annual SCI Hall of Fame™ induction ceremony and gala at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on the evening of October 30th, hosted by author and journalist, John Hockenberry, who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in its inaugural year.

Formed by the National Spinal Cord Injury Association (NSCIA) in 2005, the SCI Hall of Fame was created to recognize excellence and honor individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to quality of life and advancements toward a better future for all individuals with spinal cord injury. Participation in this year's process was strong, with nearly 100 nominees nationwide.

This year's inductees and their categories included: **Dr. Michael Boninger**, Executive Director of the Center for Assistive Technology at the University of Pittsburgh (Assistive Technology), **The Medtronic Foundation** (Benefactor), **Stanley T. Sigman**, Chairman and CEO of Atlanta-based Cingular Wireless (Corporate Executive), **Joni Eareckson-Tada**, author and founder of *Joni and Friends* (Disability Activist), **Cindy Purcell**, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (Disability Educator), **Lisa Thorson**, advocate for full access to the arts and co-founder of *Next Move Unlimited* (Entertainment), **James Shepherd**, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Shepherd Center (Entrepreneur), **Gordon Mansfield**, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Government Executive), **Bob Kafka**, Co-Director of ADAPT (Grassroots Organizer), **Congressman James Langevin** (Legislative), **Joe Shapiro**, author and reporter for National Public Radio (Media), **Dr. Barth Green**, co-founder, President and Clinical Program Director of the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis (Research in Basic Science), **Lex Freiden**, Senior Vice President at The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (Research in Quality of Life) and **Dave Kiley**, noted wheelchair athlete and director of *Turning Point* (Sports). In addition to the 14 Hall of Fame categories, NSCIA presented an *Emerging Leader* Award to **Cody Unser**, founder of the Cody Unser First Step Foundation, for exceptional leadership qualities in a local or regional capacity toward the improvement of opportunities or quality of life for persons living with SCI. To learn about all this year's nominees, visit www.spinalcord.org.

The ceremony was hosted by NSCIA in conjunction with the second *Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Summit™*, October 29th – November 1, 2006, at the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda, MD, and was supported by a wide range of sponsors including The Medtronic Foundation, The Craig H. Nielsen Foundation, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Klein, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Allergan, Inc., Acorda Therapeutics, Henry H. Kessler Foundation, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Microsoft, Motorola, McDonald's Corporation, Cingular Wireless, Abilities Expo, Astratech, Quickie / Sunrise Medical, Restorative Therapies, Ron Shapiro Charitable Foundation, Christopher Reeve Foundation, Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, The Shepherd Center, New Mobility Magazine, Ability Magazine and HDI Publishers

Pat Maher, chairman of the nomination, voting and selection process, shares his perspective on the significance of the Hall of Fame. "What has been most rewarding for me has been learning how many outstanding persons and organizations are working to better the quality of life for persons living with spinal cord injury. The heartfelt language used in nominating in every category suggests how deeply impacting the work of these nominees has been and will continue to be."

Through an online voting process, members of NSCIA were able to vote for the nominees they believed were most deserving in each category. Each member's vote was counted only once to ensure a fair voting process. After open voting, the nominees with the highest number of votes were reviewed by a Voting Selection Committee, with representation from across the SCI spectrum, who determined the inductees in each category. Last year's first-ever *SCI Hall of Fame* gala event honored 10 individuals who have made significant contributions to quality of life and advancements toward a better future for all individuals with spinal cord injury. Those 10 inaugural inductees, and their categories, were: Christopher Reeve, Benefactor; Teddy Pendergrass (PA), Entertainment; Marilyn Hamilton (CA), Entrepreneur; Senator Tom Harkin (IA), Legislative; Barry Corbet, Disability Awareness/Activism; John Hockenberry (NY), Media; Randy Snow (TX), Sports; Rory Cooper (PA), Assistive Technology; Duane French (WA), Corporate/Government Executive, and Wise Young (NJ), Research. Many of the inaugural group attended the Gala to welcome the new inductees.

The Old Dominion Chapter Of The National Spinal Cord Injury Association (ODC/NSCIA) Needs Your Assistance.

The good news is that your help won't cost you a penny! In this time of Holiday shopping and on-line purchases, we would like to remind you of the Benevolink program. ODC/NSCIA has joined Benevolink's program, as a year round fundraiser for our 501c3 non-profit organization.

Join. Shop. Give.
It's Giving Made Simple.



JOIN BENEVOLINK

It's FREE, simple and secure!
Support **ODC/NSCIA** and other great causes, year round.

We ask that you please pass this information along to five of your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors to tell them how they can support **ODC/NSCIA** through Benevolink.

To learn more about our organization, please visit www.odcnsCIA.org, e-mail us at: info@odcnsCIA.org, or call us at: 804-726-4990.

When registering for your Benevolink account, please be sure to specify **The Old Dominion Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association** in zip code **23226**, as your charity of choice.

SHOP YEAR ROUND

Benevolink is a program that enables people just like you to contribute to worthy causes of their choice simply by shopping. Benevolink works with over 300 brand name national retail and online businesses that give 5% - 7% or more of every dollar you spend to the charities of your choice. There is no fee for consumers or benefiting charities to participate.

Shoppers simply must log onto the Benevolink website before you select and visit your favorite retailer's web site, rather than going directly to the retailers site. Just by adding this extra step to how you shop, you can accumulate charitable dollars and four times a year direct them to the **ODC/NSCIA** and other worthwhile causes.

Give your funds to the Old Dominion Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association

UKROP'S SUPER MARKETS:

Every time you make a purchase of Ukrops brand groceries, using your Valued Customer Card*, a portion of your purchase is eligible to be designated to your charity(s) of choice. Benevolink is now administrating Ukrops Golden Gift Receipt program, so you will no longer receive paper Golden Gift receipts at Ukrops stores. Please continue to support the ODC/NSCIA by registering your UVC # with Benevolink

Go to www.benevolink.com or call **1-800-556-GIVE (4483) 9-5pm to :**

- **Learn how Benevolink Works**
- **Check out Store Listings**
- **Join and Shop for the ODC/NSCIA!**

Stop struggling for gift ideas! Order GIFT CARDS online.
It's an excellent way to contribute & many stores offer free S&H

Please register now!

It only takes a few minutes and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that your Holiday purchases are helping others!

Thank you!

**The Old Dominion Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association
P.O. Box 8326
Richmond, VA 23226**

Profile: Michael Chenail

Advocate for disabled helps businesses serve customers like himself

BY JOHN REID BLACKWELL
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER
Tuesday, October 24, 2006

Michael Chenail's professional mission is also a personal calling. Chenail wants to make businesses and other public facilities more accessible to people with disabilities. The firm he founded in 2003, Compliance Alliance, provides consulting to businesses to help them achieve that. "It's a unique kind of business," said Chenail, who is based in Midlothian and works locally and in the Southeast. "It's not something that the average businessperson would consider or realize is out there."

Chenail has spent years as an advocate for disabled people and has built an encyclopedic knowledge of the law surrounding accessibility.

But what he really brings to his work is personal experience. He has used a wheelchair for 21 years, and he knows the barriers, such as improperly designed wheelchair ramps or poorly located parking spaces, that make businesses and other public areas unfriendly to people with disabilities.

Chenail's work involves visiting his clients' facilities, identifying those barriers and making recommendations for improvements. He also reviews blueprints for building projects. His message is that better accessibility is good for business, and it doesn't necessarily involve major expenses.

"This is not just about people in wheelchairs," Chenail said. One in five Americans has a disability and, as the population ages, demand will grow for better accommodations at all kinds of public facilities, he said. "Businesses that make more accommodations will reap the benefits," he said. "It opens the doors to more people."

When inspecting a restaurant, hotel or other location, Chenail looks at such things as whether there is a clear path through the facility and the location of disabled parking -- "I've seen parking spaces on hills that are dangerous," he said -- or simply such things as how easy it is to open the doors. "One big mistake is if they have a wheelchair ramp that goes right up to the door," he said. "If I'm going up a ramp and trying to open the door, then I'm going to end up going back down the ramp." When a business needs to make upgrades, "calling in an architect may be premature," he said. "Little things can make a big difference. Often, it's hard to see, but maybe there is a simpler alternative and a less expensive alternative."

A native of Massachusetts, Chenail is a lifelong outdoorsman and sportsman. He started out as a tree trimmer, the same profession as his father. "Climbing trees was a passion since I was a little kid," he said. He also worked in graphic arts on the side. In 1985, when he was 25, Chenail was in a motorcycle accident that paralyzed him below the waist. "In four more years, I'll have been using a wheelchair for half my life," said Chenail, a 46-year-old father of two who remains active in sports, hunting and fishing. He is a competitive pool player and has been skydiving. "It was an educational experience, to go from being a tree climber to what I am doing today," Chenail said. "It's been a challenge, but it has also been rewarding."

After his accident, Chenail continued to work in graphic design. He started his own sign company while also working as a peer counselor for people with disabilities. When he moved to Richmond three years ago, he initially looked for a job in graphic arts. "When I started running into barriers trying to find work, I realized how inaccessible much of the Richmond area is," he said. So he started Compliance Alliance. Many of his clients are in the hospitality industry, including such hotels and restaurants as Ruth's Chris Steak House in Chesterfield County. General Manager Eddie Wood said the restaurant was already accessible, but he hired Chenail to recommend any small changes that might make the restaurant more friendly. "He definitely knows his business and knows what it takes [to be accessible] -- not just for himself but for anyone with any type of challenge," Wood said.



Michael Chenail, owner of Compliance Alliance, demonstrates the wheelchair accessibility at Ruth's Chris Steak House in the Shoppes at Bellgrade.

EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Since founding the firm, Chenail said his business growth has been steady but not fast. Some of his work involves serving as an consultant or expert witness in lawsuits against businesses accused of failing to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The federal civil-rights law, passed in 1990, prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and requires that most places of public accommodation be accessible.

"I would prefer to work with businesses to help them become compliant before a suit is brought," Chenail said. The ADA was a breakthrough in recognizing the needs of people with disabilities but, in some ways, it was a setback for the grass-roots movement, Chenail said. "The disability movement was so strong back in the '80s," he said. After the ADA was passed, "we let up the pressure to bring more accessibility to our communities, believing that the law would make that happen." Instead, many businesses invested the minimum amount to make themselves compliant. "Many made attempts to become compliant, but they didn't have much guidance," Chenail said. At the same time, the universal symbol for disabled accessibility the wheelchair sign -- has been "overused and abused," he said. "I've seen that sign outside restrooms that I can't even get in."

Chenail wants to recognize businesses that have gone beyond the minimum requirements. He has developed his own ratings system that gives businesses gold, silver or bronze ratings depending on their level of accessibility. Gold is the highest and goes to businesses that are fully accessible, allowing disabled people to maximize their independence. Chenail provides stickers for businesses that go through the process to place at their entrances. He is also working on a travel guide for people with disabilities, which he hopes to make available online. "I think it is important that we have a system that is provided for people with disabilities by people with disabilities," he said. "There are a lot of good businesses out there that are accessible, that people in the disabled community don't even know about."

Contact staff writer John Reid Blackwell at jblackwell@timesdispatch.com or (804) 775-8123.

This story can be found at:

http://www.timesdispatch.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RTD%2FMGArticle%2FRTD_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&id=1149191310134&path=%21business&s=1045855934855

U.S. Department of Labor Forms Alliance with SHRM to Promote Employment of Workers with Disabilities

WASHINGTON — The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) of the U.S. Department of Labor and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) recently established an alliance to encourage and promote the employment of people with disabilities.

The formal alliance, a first for ODEP with a major organization, will ensure that SHRM and ODEP stakeholders collaborate in this national effort by providing information, guidance, and access to resources. "This alliance formalizes the relationship we have had with SHRM, benefiting SHRM as it serves its membership with the resources ODEP brings to the table and offering ODEP the opportunity for broader contact with human resource professionals," said Roy Grizzard, assistant secretary of labor for disability employment policy.

The new relationship between SHRM and ODEP will target areas in training and education, outreach and communication and technical assistance, and it will promote a national dialogue on the employment of persons with disabilities — a human resource that is underutilized. The partnership will also provide recruitment, hiring, and advancement information through educational, access and research activities.

SHRM is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. Representing more than 205,000 individual members, the society's mission is to serve the needs of HR professionals by providing the most essential and comprehensive resources available. Founded in 1948, SHRM currently has more than 550 affiliated chapters and members in more than 100 countries.

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) was authorized by Congress in the Department of Labor's FY 2001 appropriation. Recognizing the need for a national policy to ensure that people with disabilities are fully integrated into the 21st century workforce, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao delegated authority and assigned responsibility to the assistant secretary for disability employment policy. ODEP is a policy agency in the Department of Labor. For more information, visit ODEP online at www.dol.gov/odep under Circle of Champions.



ARE YOU A JOB SEEKER WITH A DISABILITY? IF SO, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network (EARN) is the premier provider of **free** disability consulting and candidate sourcing for employers. Similar to a recruiting agency, EARN recruits on behalf of employers actively seeking candidates with disabilities for competitive jobs. EARN is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

If you are looking for a job, we may have some leads for you! Follow these steps to learn what jobs EARN is recruiting for:

1. Visit <http://members.earnworks.com> and enter User ID=Visitor and Password=Visitor. You do not need to sign up and will have full access to EARN's job postings as a visitor.
2. Search EARN's jobs and see if there may be a match for you.
3. Once you find a job you'd like to inquire about, email EARN at earn@earnworks.com with your resume and be sure to include the Job ID number and title.
4. EARN will review your resume and the job qualifications and instruct you on next steps.
5. EARN will help connect you with employers when there's a good fit and offer any follow-up that's needed.

Please note that EARN is not set up to provide career counseling or job placement for individuals although we would be happy to assist you with locating assistance in your area. We will also keep your resume on file to reference as jobs are posted with EARN.

Contact Us Today!

www.earnworks.com
1-866-EARN-NOW (1-866-327-6669) (V/TTY)
earn@earnworks.com

The Employer Assistance and Recruiting Network (EARN) is a nationwide cost-free recruiting and consultation service that provides employers with workforce solutions. EARN connects employers with a national network of employment service providers with access to jobseekers. As the venue linking employers to service providers and their clients, EARN does not participate in any way in the actual discussions and transactions between employers and service providers/jobseekers. Read more about EARN's policy at <http://www.earnworks.com/privacy.htm>.

HELP WANTED

Job Title: Administrative Coordinator, Old Dominion Chapter, NSCIA

General Summary:

Organizes and coordinates the day-to-day aspects of ODC / NSCIA in fulfilling its mission to enable people with SCI/D to achieve their highest level of health, independence and quality of life.

Qualifications:

- Knowledge of Spinal Cord Injury and its impact on the family and individual
- Reliable, proactive and able to work independently
- Excellent oral communication / telephone skills required.
- Computer skills including familiarity with Microsoft Outlook, Word for Windows, Access and Excel.
- Good organizational and follow-through skills
- Mentoring experience preferred but not essential
- Must have drivers license and own transportation

Responsibilities

Working with the president and all appropriate committees / Board Members, the Administrative Coordinator will manage the day-to-day activities of the Association in conformity with the policies established by the Board.

Work Schedule

On a regular schedule within the hours of 9am to 5pm Monday through Friday to meets the needs of the organization. In general, 10 to 20 hours per week

Compensation:

\$12 to \$15 an hour based upon qualifications and experience (no benefits)

To apply or for more information

Call the ODC office at (804) 726-4990 or e-mail info@odcncsia.org

Volunteers Needed

- Do you have a desire to become more involved in the Old Dominion Chapter?
- Have you wanted to help, but didn't know how?

Here's your opportunity to get more involved, build skills that you can use in the workplace, network with others with disabilities, and make a difference in our community! The Old Dominion Chapter is currently looking for as many people as possible to serve on the following committees:

Mentor Program: Responsible for finalizing and beginning to implement mentor program. Looking for people willing to assist with formalizing program and training sessions, as well as those interested in serving as mentors.

Meetings and Presentations: Responsible for coordinating meetings, education and social / recreational programming for membership.

Communications and Marketing: Responsible for facilitating communication to members as well as for materials, presentations and campaigns to increase public awareness about the chapter. This committee will assist in creating Chapter brochures and newsletters.

Fund-raising: Responsible to develop and implement a plan for fund-raising activities.

We are also looking for individuals with SCI, parents, close friends or other close family members of someone who has sustained a SCI that would like to share their experience with local high school students through the "Think First" Program.

If you are interested in any of these areas, please contact the office at (804) 726-4990 or info@odcnsCIA.org

Old Dominion Chapter Quality of Life Program Continues

ODC / NSCIA continues to offer *Quality of Life Grants* to provide financial support to ODC / NSCIA members with spinal cord injury or disease. The grant program was developed to encourage members to participate in hobbies, sports, educational or recreational programs or other activities that help them achieve their highest level of health, independence and quality of life. Grants can be used to cover pre-approved registration, membership, tickets, travel, or equipment / repair costs. During the 2006-2007 fiscal year, we will be offering up to twelve awards of up to \$250 each!**

** Only one award will be allowed per person during each 12-month fiscal period. Applicants must be members of ODC / NSCIA and must agree to a list of terms and conditions to be eligible to receive a grant. Written pre-approval will be required before funds are received. The application review process requires a minimum of 14 business days upon receipt of the application. ODC / NSCIA reserves the right to limit, expand or eliminate this grant program at any time.

To get an application, go to our website www.odcnsCIA.org and follow the links. Or call the office at (804) 726-4990 to receive an application by mail.

Many acts of kindness

Quadriplegic entrepreneur's legacy likely to be philanthropic actions

By Liz Benston
Las Vegas Sun

Las Vegas resident Laura Baker had never heard of Ameristar Casinos or Craig Neilsen when she received roughly \$10,000 to lower her bathroom sink and remodel her shower to accommodate her wheelchair - a change that allowed Baker to more easily bathe and groom herself.

Baker is among hundreds of people around the country with spinal cord injuries who have benefited from the quiet largesse of Neilsen - a shy, unassuming executive in an industry known for both monumental buildings and egos. Neilsen, who died unexpectedly on Sunday at age 65, will be known in the gaming industry as a driven entrepreneur who leveraged his family's stake in two rural Nevada casinos to create one of the nation's largest and best-performing casino companies. But it is his work outside of the casino industry - a philanthropic crusade stemming from an injury he rarely spoke of or acknowledged in public - that perhaps will be his most remembered legacy.

A car accident on a snowy road trip from his casinos in Jackpot to an office in Idaho left Neilsen a quadriplegic in 1985. He was just beginning to embark on a long-term plan to create a major casino enterprise. After a year of rehabilitation, he was back on the job running the Cactus Petes and Horseshu casinos and a separate real estate investment company in Idaho. In 1987 Neilsen bought out the remaining casino shareholders and took Ameristar Casinos public in 1993. Being confined to a wheelchair didn't get in the way of Neilsen expanding his business. Under his hands-on management, the company opened its first non-Nevada casino in Mississippi in 1994 and now owns seven casinos in five states. Technology enabled Neilsen to keep in constant contact with managers and other employees from his home office. It's the kind of inspiring story that could make for an engaging book or in-depth article. But Neilsen, who didn't give interviews, was not one to discuss his accomplishments.

His greatest praise often came from competitors, who acknowledged that the company's investment in high-quality restaurants, entertainment and high-tech slot machines often yielded more profitable casinos. "He was very energetic (and) a consummate planner in everything he did," said John Boushy, a 27-year veteran of Harrah's Entertainment who joined Ameristar as president in August and succeeds Neilsen as chief executive. "Despite his condition he accomplished what a lot of people would have loved to accomplish, under any circumstances." Neilsen began a succession plan years ago to ensure that people who shared his goals carry on the company's growth plans. His controlling interest in the company's stock will be transferred to the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation. Neilsen's son, Ray Neilsen, and Ameristar Executive Vice President and Co-Chairman Gordon R. Kanofsky will serve as successor co-trustees of the foundation.

While many large companies have foundations, rarely has a company been able to make such a significant contribution toward a single cause. Neilsen formed the nonprofit foundation in 2002 to direct money to research and treatment of spinal cord injuries. The foundation has distributed about \$7.5 million in grants to centers such as the Mayo Clinic and its study of nerve regeneration as well as rehabilitation efforts such as those at Denver's Craig Hospital, which has created creative activities for paraplegics including bowling and scuba diving. The money came at a critical time, advocates say, because of government cutbacks in medical research. "Twenty years ago you'd pass people in wheelchairs and say, 'That's too bad.' Now there's so much hope out there," foundation Director Beth Goldsmith said.

Neilsen's commitment to philanthropy extended to the rank and file, resulting in one of the highest donation rates for a company of its size. Ameristar employees and matching corporate funds raised \$9 million last year for nonprofit organizations of all stripes. The company's annual golf tournament - a way to encourage giving in the casino industry - raised more than \$1 million for the Miami Project, the world's largest paralysis research center. Donations from the foundation supported the National Spinal Cord Injury Association's inaugural summit last year, gathering thousands of families, patients and health care professionals nationwide. Executive Director Marcie Roth calls Neilsen a "strong role model" for personal and financial success. "At first I wasn't aware that he had a spinal cord injury - I was stunned," Roth said.

In his home state, Neilsen's foundation has allowed hundreds with spinal injuries to receive therapy and home modifications that aren't covered by insurance or formerly required a two-year wait for state aid. One of the primary recipients is Rebuilding All Goals Efficiently, a Las Vegas nonprofit organization that has received about \$300,000 since 2004 and has served as a last resort for more than 60 Nevada residents over that period. "It's had a major impact," its founder and Executive Director Reggie Bennett said.

Liz Benston can be reached at 259-4077 or at benston@lasvegassun.com.

New Dimensions Scholarship Program

The Adaptive Sports Association has recently established a unique scholarship program in cooperation with various recreational therapists, service clubs, support groups and disability organizations. The goal of this program is to enhance the lives of individuals with spinal cord injuries, amputations, or similar disabilities. Recipients will receive an all expense paid trip to Durango to participate in adaptive sports and outdoor educational programs. Our hope is that recipients will assist in spreading the word about our program in their communities.

Expenses included in Scholarship Fund:

Round-trip transportation to and from Durango, Colorado, 5 nights lodging with a Durango area host family, most meals, accessible ground transportation while in Durango, evening activities such as informal potluck gatherings, and a farewell dinner (Winter Program). Four (4) days of adaptive ski or snowboard instruction including lift tickets, equipment and private instructors. The Summer Program is 4 days of adaptive summer sports such as river rafting, sea-kayaking, canoeing, fishing or hiking!

Candidate Selection:

The ideal candidate would be an individual with a spinal cord injury or progressive disease, who uses a wheelchair. Individuals who have had limited exposure to travel and sporting activities are preferred. We would like first time skiers. Individuals who have some financial limitations should be encouraged to apply. Due to the fact this individual may be traveling alone we would prefer them to be 16 years of age or older. Please keep in mind that these are general guidelines, there is flexibility in the above criteria.

Candidate Application Process: **APPLICATIONS DUE BY DECEMBER 15th, 2006**

For more information and to get started on the application process, go to <http://www.asadurango.org/scholarships.html> or call **970-259-0374**

Upcoming Events

ODC / NSCIA Holiday Party

Tuesday, December 12th – 5:30pm to 9pm: HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital, Richmond
Please bring a covered dish to share

Charlottesville Cardinals (Wheelchair Basketball)

Richmond Invitational Tournament

Friday December 8th – Fairfield Middle School 4:30- 8:30 pm

Saturday December 9th – Highland Springs High School 8:30am – 8:30pm

Sunday December 10th – Highland Springs High School 8:30 – 1pm

9th Annual Division 3 National Tournament

March 7-10, 2007 in Charlottesville, VA. Games will be played at Slaughter Hall at the University of Virginia.

For more information contact Rick Shifflett or Tom Vandever at (434)971-9629

Sheltering Arms

December 14th “Holiday Feast” SA Hanover location (in the atrium) 7-9 pm. Dinner and musical skits \$10 per person.

January 11 “Casino Night” 6 -9 PM SA Midtown location. Finger foods and prizes offered. \$10 per person.

Ongoing – Caregiver Support Group 2nd Tuesday of each month 6-7:30pm SA Midtown Location

Please RSVP to Valerie Newman for any of the above at (804) 764-5275.

Sportable

Saturday, Dec 9th **Quad Rugby Clinic** with the East Coast Cripples 1-4pm

Monday, Dec 11th **Indoor Rock Climbing** at Peak Experiences 1-4 pm

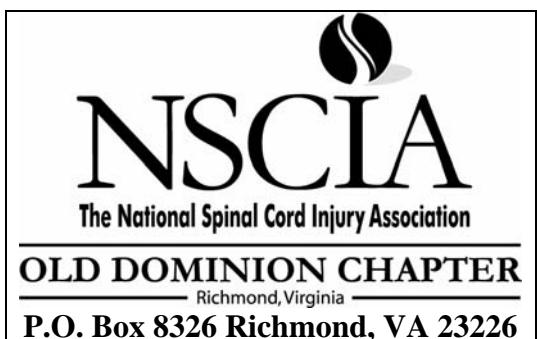
Saturday Jan 13th (tentative) **Sled Hockey Clinic** 10-2pm

Saturday Jan 20th **Adaptive Skiing with Therapeutic Adventures**

Saturday Feb 17th **Adaptive Skiing with Therapeutic Adventures**

* working on bringing in a Paralympics Wheelchair Fencing Guest Clinician in February

For more details about events and locations visit their website www.sportable.org or call (804) 677-1467



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