

## **2015 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES**

Commissioners: Paul Remy (Chair), Geila Aronson (Treasurer), Susan Myerson, Jana Katz, Lois Diamond, Peter Melvin, Jessica Stanford, Chanie Minkowitz and Amy Karas

The year of 2015 was a productive year for the Commission on Disabilities. It met nine times to discuss issues concerning Sharon residents with disabilities, and continued working with town officials to increase accessibility in the Town of Sharon. The Commission also had a Disability Awareness Day event, increasing awareness about people with disabilities and services that are available to them.

1. Commissioners made T-shirts commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990 – 2015). The Binah School, a former all Jewish girl school in Sharon, granted permission to use the image, which is on the beautiful inclusion mural that is permanently on display at Memorial Beach, on the shirts. Sixty of the shirts were purchased at the cost of \$445, and plans were to buy more if necessary. The Commission hoped to sell all of them at \$15 each, to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ADA and support the Commission. Proceeds were to be used to help fund accessibility projects and equipment. But Commissioners didn't sell as many as we anticipated. For example, only four people ordered the T-shirts at the Square Jam. Only 30 shirts were sold. Therefore, the Commission didn't make money, but did not lose any either.

Three shirts were raffled off at the Commission's Disability Awareness Day, and three will be given to the speakers who spoke at the event. The Commission is considering selling the remaining shirts at half price or donating them.

2. Three Commission members attended the May Town Meeting to support the \$55,000 accessibility study of Town Hall and other town buildings. The purpose of the study was to determine how to make these buildings accessible, such as installing an elevator in Town Hall. Due to Chairperson of the Commission, Paul Remy's, speech impediment, Vice Chairperson, Jana Katz, read his statement to support the study. Several town residents, one of whom was an architect, questioned the cost of the study. Selectmen William Heiti informed town meeting attendees that several architectural firms recommended the \$55,000 study. After the town residents approved it, Selectman Heiti thanked Paul and the Commission for their support.
3. In May, Chairperson Paul Remy received the Volunteer of the Year Award for the Town of Sharon, and a Massachusetts Senate Citation for his dedicated work on the Commission. Because of Paul's speech impediment, Senator James Timilty read Paul's statement thanking everyone for the awards. He also thanked his fellow Commissioners for their devoted work and for electing him as Chairperson.

4. The Commission worked with the Council on Aging Director, Norma FitzGerald, in getting the Assisted Listening System (ALS) operational, so people who are hard of hearing could participate in meetings, conferences, and social events. COA purchased some equipment in 2014 for the system. Paul Remy hoped to meet with Norma to help determine what additional equipment is needed. Paul was on vacation and when he returned, Norma was very busy making sure that her department ran smoothly after she retired in September and a new director was hired. Paul will be meeting with the new COA Director, Kathleen Medeiros, in January or February concerning the ALS. Depending upon the cost for the needed additional equipment, the Commission might be willing and able to purchase it, or pay a part of it.
5. Three Commission members (Susan Myerson, Lois Diamond, and Paul Remy) participated in the Sharon 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Parade. Thanks to the Adult Center they rode in one of its mini-vans through the parade route. It was an honor for them to represent the Commission, and they eagerly waved to the crowds. Michael, who drove the van, was incredibly patient and helpful. After the parade, he even took the time to drive Lois and Paul home. The Commission deeply appreciated the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee's permission to be represented in the parade, the Adult Center for allowing us to use its van, and Michael for driving us.
6. In October, the Commission had a Disability Awareness Day. Commissioners really appreciated the Board of Selectmen for waving the \$200 hourly rental fee for using the Community Center's ballroom, and everyone who made that day possible. For six months, the Disability Awareness Day subcommittee planned and organized the event. Lois Diamond did an incredible job, spending endless hours calling and emailing vendors inviting them to the Awareness Day. Fifteen vendors attended.

Susan Myerson did a splendid job at being Paul's voice reading his master of ceremony notes. Our three inspiring speakers were; Selectman JJ McGrath, who has a Nephew with Muscular Dystrophy, Professor Lester Cory, co-founder and President of the Society for Human Advancement through Rehabilitation Engineering, and Faith Carter from Camp Jabberwocky, a summer Camp on Martha's Vineyard for children and adults with disabilities. In addition, Jana Katz was able to get and set up a video of a TED Talk from Aimee Mullin, who has two prosthetic legs. Her TED Talk was about moving forward even when faced with disabilities and adversity, and rising to amazing levels. Sharon Community Television did a wonderful job filming the three hour Disability Awareness Day event and aired the video on local Channel 8.

Commission members thought that the Awareness Day was better than they expected, but unfortunately, not many attended. As a result, the Commission decided to wait for several

years to have another one, and want more help from other organizations to plan and organize that event.

7. In November, Recreation Director Amanda Levasseur gave the Commission and Ryan, grandson of Dr. Sidney Rosenthal, who served as the Commission's Chairperson for 17 years, a presentation of her plans for making Ames Street Playground accessible. Ryan is now in the Boy Scouts and looking for an Eagle Scout project. Amanda will inform the Commission and Ryan in January or February of 2016, how they can help make the accessibility project a reality.
8. Despite the excellent job the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) did in 2014 to make the Sharon Train Station accessible, all handicapped parking spaces are several hundred feet from the accessible platform. This is problematic, especially during the winter months, for wheelchair/scooter users and people who have difficulty walking.

Town Engineer Peter O'Cain has been trying for months to get the MBTA to install handicapped parking near the platform. The Commission got involved with this matter in September. Attorney Jessica Stanford, who is a Commission member, was prepared to write the MBTA a formal complaint. However, Mr. O'Cain and the MBTA had a meeting in December to discuss the handicapped parking issue. Since the Town of Sharon owns the Boston side of the train Station, the MBTA gave the Sharon DPW permission to put in the handicapped parking spaces, which were done the third week of December. The Providence side of the station is owned by the MBTA. It will not install handicapped parking on its side, claiming that it would be too difficult because the sidewalk is uneven getting to the accessible platform.

Not having handicapped parking near the platform on the Providence side might be in violation of Americans with Disabilities Act's regulations. Therefore, the Commission is still considering writing to the MBTA with a formal complaint.

9. The Commission awarded a special needs Sharon High School senior a \$750 Scholarship to help finance her college education.
10. While attending a summer concert at Beach Tree Park, a man informed Paul Remy that there was only a handicapped sign on a utility pole near that park, and no handicapped symbol on the ground. As a result, several people parked there without realizing it and they received \$200 tickets. Paul wrote DPW Director, Eric Hooper, the following day informing him about the situation. That week his department painted a handicapped symbol on the ground. The Commission deeply appreciated the DPW's quick response.
11. As of January 11, 2016, the Commission has \$4,194.54, \$1,292.57 in the handicapped parking ticket fund and \$2,901.97 in the donation fund. Most of the funds were raised in the 2014 "A Bark in the Park" fundraiser, and from the handicapped parking program. In

2015, about \$400 came from the parking ticket program. This is good news because not many are parking illegally in handicapped spaces. As stated previously, the Commission only earned \$450 selling the T-shirts, which is a small profit because the shirts cost \$445.

12. Two dedicated members, James Waters and Sandy Biber, unfortunately had to resign for personal reasons. The Commission misses them.
13. Jessica Stanford and Chanie Minkowitz joined the Commission.