

Barrier Awareness Day 2011



A wheelchair tour leaving The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum gives people without disabilities the chance to experience the world from a different perspective. The tour was part of Barrier Awareness Day, one of the events during Disability Awareness Week. Holding the gate is Sarah Everhart Skeels, the tour leader. In front is Bill Riccio, Director of Public Services for the City of Newport, followed by John Barker, Newport Police Traffic Sergeant, and Susan Cooper, Director of Recreation for the City of Newport.

Persons with disabilities encounter many barriers when touring or trying to do business around the island, yet it is difficult for persons without disabilities to perceive these barriers and their effects. Barrier Awareness Day, held last Thursday, April 14th, at The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, created the opportunity for members of the community without disabilities to experience life from a different perspective.

Tours were offered at The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum and surrounding area either by wheelchair, blindfolded or in silence. This was a chance to experience some of the challenges to accessibility that members of the

community who have disabilities must attempt to navigate in everyday life. Approximately 60 community members turned out for the event.

Benny's of Middletown was this year's recipient of the "Access Is Attitude" award for ensuring the store is physically accessible to everyone as well as embracing a commitment to welcome all customers without regard to disability. Benny's had been nominated by members of the community and selected to receive the award by the Barrier Awareness Day committee who helped to sponsored the event. Additionally, Benny's was recognized with a commendation from the Town of Middletown, presented by Town Council Vice President, Bruce Long, as well as a honored with a Citation from the Rhode Island State House of Representatives, presented by Representative, Peter Martin.

In the past, Barrier Awareness Day had been held on a bi-annual basis, in 2007 and 2009, and at that time was known as Disability Awareness Day. These past events were produced by members of the Newport Accessibility Advisory committee along with other community organizations.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum (ITHF&M) hosted this year's event. Last year, ITHF&M inducted into its Hall of Fame, Brad Parks, the pioneer worldwide of wheelchair tennis. Additionally, the organization has made great strides towards making not only the physical site but also the museum's content more accessible.

Also, supporting Barrier Awareness Day 2011 in various capacities were Lifespan Home Medical, The Rhode Island office of Rehabilitative Services, The Newport Gateway Center and Portofino Bar & Grille. The event was produced by Looking Upwards in collaboration with the Barrier Awareness Day committee.

Barrier Awareness Day was part of Disabilities Awareness Week, a weeklong series of events that was designed to highlight the talent and diversity in our community as well as deepen awareness of the daily experience of various people with disabilities. Disabilities Awareness Week was produced by Middletown-based, nonprofit agency, Looking Upwards, in collaboration with Salve Regina University, members of The Newport Accessibility Advisory Committee and a working group of private citizens who were committed to supporting the event.