

State Library Will Sponsor Preconference on ADA Compliance Review

by Shannon Roy, Editor

The State Library of Kansas is presenting a preconference at Tri-Conference 2006 on Reviewing Your Library for ADA Compliance. I would urge you to consider attending this program, which will share a lot of information about disability compliance and how to implement it in the library environment. The preconference will be held on Wednesday, April 5, from 8:00 to noon. It will be in Room 208 of the Century II Convention Center.

The Americans with Disabilities Act has been the law of the land for fifteen years. Kansas libraries have come a long way toward barrier-free service since I came to Kansas in 1992. But far from losing importance, disability issues are becoming more urgent than ever for several reasons:

- The population of Kansas is aging and with older Kansans come more conditions that are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The 2004 Census says that 16.7% of Kansans are over the age of 60. In many Kansas counties, the percentage is far higher than that. As the Baby Boom Generation moves into their sixties, they will be very concerned about barrier-free public environments. While their health is better than any senior population of the past, they will suffer from a number of health conditions and disabilities that are covered by the ADA. These include heart conditions, diabetes, cancer, bad backs, impaired vision, impaired hearing, impaired mobility, impaired dexterity, impaired speech and impaired cognition.
- Many people are surviving health impairments, accidents, trauma injuries and combat casualties that would once have been fatal. As they recover, they are trained to expect full participation in active lifestyles. Many of them are very aware of their rights under the law.
- Disabled children have been protected by the ADA all their lives and their parents have had to learn to advocate for them. Neither they nor their parents are likely to be patient with any limitations placed on their activities by physical barriers or inadequate accommodation.
- Kansas librarians need to know their own rights under the ADA, no matter how concerned they are for their library users. Undue hardship can be documented in some cases as a reason for noncompliance. But a library that has no plan for ADA compliance and shows no evidence of good faith effort is inviting criticism that might escalate into legal problems. A library building program that does not result in complete barrier-free access makes the library very vulnerable to legal problems.

The State Library has had a fine program of disability compliance review. Because of new projects and changing job responsibilities, we will not be able to offer this unless there is an actual legal problem. But we will continue to work with librarians and trustees by telephone and e-mail and we can share ways to make a library review more comprehensive and more effective.

Many people were originally impatient with or threatened by ADA regulations. But the law has a fine track record and has made the country a visibly better place to live. Most librarians and trustees are now genuinely supportive of this public service concern and are actively planning to make their libraries not just barrier-free but user-friendly to all Kansans.