

Consult the Cat

by Shannon Roy, Editor

The Kansas Libraries Newsletter is starting a new column with this issue called “**Consult the Cat**.” The Cat, like cats everywhere, is all-wise but reserves the right to confer with colleagues, since no one ever knows what a Kansas librarian might come up with. You are welcome to send questions and concerns about Kansas librarianship to the Cat and her colleagues.

Denise deRocheFort-Reynolds of the Frank Carlson Library in Concordia, recently sent this question. “We have seen an increase in people using little motorized scooters. What accommodations are appropriate for these scooters? Depending on the size of the scooters, some parts of our library are difficult to navigate, even though we have implemented an ADA Compliance Plan. Also, some of these scooters are “pleasure craft” and not a medical necessity. How do we politely differentiate?”



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The Cat loved this question, since she has her heart set on a little red scooter when her leaping days are over and she certainly doesn't intend to give up public libraries. But, in fact, ADA regulations were written to accommodate wheelchair users and have not been changed as scooters have grown more popular. At this point, the regulations would apply to both. Many scooter users do retain some mobility and do not necessarily have the same limitations as wheelchair users. But library staff should be aware that if a scooter user really cannot reach a library item, the library staff has legal responsibility to make sure they get complete access to every library service and all library materials. The legal requirement is whatever level of assistance it takes for the library user to have the information and/or materials he or she needs.

Library staff should also be aware that the ADA regulations apply to disabilities that genuinely interfere with normal life activities. They will probably err on the side of courtesy but no one has the right to be disabled in the library and able-bodied in the town. As long as a library user is observing the library's policies for appropriate behavior, the use of pleasure craft should not be restricted. The Cat believes in library users enjoying themselves as much as possible.

Stack aisles should be at least 36 inches wide with a perimeter aisle of at least 40 inches. If the stacks must run into the wall, the stack aisles should be at least 42 inches wide. Scooters should be able to navigate the aisles, but in a few cases they might have to back out.

Magazines are supposed to be no more than 50 inches off the floor, although periodical shelving continues to be higher than that. Friendly signs should remind users to ask for any needed assistance. There should be a clear passage of 40 inches between study tables and sets of study carrels, but many libraries have such severe space constraints that they cannot respect this in all areas of the library. At least part of the library's tables should be in an open area and available to wheelchair and scooter users.

Since the regulations aren't going to provide cut-and-dried answers, by far the best thing to do is to find a scooter user who really is using it for medical reasons and ask him or her to review the library with you. Reasonable accommodation should be made wherever possible and undue hardship documented whenever necessary. A disabled library user who buys into helping the library as well as himself can be a priceless resource. Give any such Friend a purr from the