A month in, bills pour in for hearings

by Jane McClure

More than one month into the 2019 legislative session, Minnesotans with disabilities and their advocates are already immersed in the committee review process. Several hundred bills have been introduced in the Minnesota House and Senate, including many disability-related measures. Those include new policy and funding asks, as well as most proposals that were sidelined during 2018.

One big effort is again spearheaded by the Best Life Alliance, which has pushed for the introduction of House File 179 and Senate File 06 in support of disability services. The Alliance and its allies are seeking more funding for disability support service, and the reversal of a devastating seven percent funding cut.

Another group, the PCA Reform Coalition, is spotlighting the personal care assistance (PCA) program and the need for rate increases. The coalition is at the capital pointing out that the program’s reimbursement rate has only increased by $1.16 per hour over the last decade. It is calling for increases to help end the high turnover rate in PCA staffing, which creates hardships and instability in the lives of people who rely on PCAs.

The coalition is pushing for a data-driven rate reimbursement framework, increased wages, an increased enhanced care rate for clients with the highest needs and consistent collection of service provider data statewide.

The House Long-Term Care Division has already heard from Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) leadership about the case crisis for Minnesota elders and people with disabilities. The state hit a 20-year high for direct care job openings in 2017. Kari Benson, DHS director of Disability Supports and Adult Services Division, said those numbers are only expected to get worse.

The PCA Reform Coalition is highlighting the Bureau of Labor Statistics figures that show the hourly wage for PCAs in Minnesota is $11.83, and at $12.69 for home health aides. A presentation to the House division showed that nationally, about 45 percent of direct support professionals live in households below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Many rely on some form of public assistance to support their families.

But the direct care and supports funding crisis are just two of many focuses for Minnesota’s diverse disability community. Calls for more support of rural and children’s mental health and ways to address increased demand for special education have been among the many disability issues heard by lawmakers over the past month.

House and Senate leaders have also highlighted the need to contain health care costs while providing needed services. Health care in all forms is expected to be a major topic, and a source of capital debate.

Special education is in the spotlight, with an eye on everything from the amount of paperwork teachers face with an eye on everything from the source of capital debate.

And health care in all forms is care costs while providing needed services. The Alliance and its allies are seeking more funding for disability support service, and the reversal of a devastating seven percent funding cut.

A rally in support of a PCA rate increase was held outside the State Office Building in 2016.

Rallies, awareness events raise profiles at state capitol

by Access Press staff

When the Minnesota Legislature is in session, it’s time for disability advocacy groups to swing into action. Rallies and days to raise awareness of a specific disability or disabilities are important aspects of any legislative process and provide a way to draw attention to key issues and needs.

Many Minnesota groups are staging or have staged 2019 events. The state’s Centers for Independent Living had their day to promote independent living February 5, after deadline for this issue of Access Press. But other groups are lining up their events and encouraging people to get involved. Some of the multi-organization events are listed with in this article.

One of the biggest annual events is Disability Day at the Capitol, which is Tuesday, February 19. Attendees from around the state are gathering to support policies and funding that focus

Two longtime disability nonprofits announce merger

by Access Press staff

Ally People Solutions and Community Inclusion Programs (CIP) of Minneapolis have announced that they will merge, with the merger taking effect April 1. The merger includes providing programs and services under a new name, which hasn’t been announced.

Before the merger takes effect, the two organizations will host an event, 3-11 p.m. Wednesday, March 13 at Indeed Brewing Company, 711 15th Ave. NE, Minneapolis. The ‘Indeed We Can’ fundraiser is regularly hosed by the brewery, with each Wednesday’s net proceeds donated to a local nonprofit, chosen and sponsored by an Indeed employee. ALLY and CIP will host the event, which will include food, fun and prizes.

A toast is planned to celebrate the upcoming merger. A program is at 5:30 p.m.

Changing times in the nonprofit world and the disability service system are driving the merger, which was announced in mid-January. A new government rate management system has resulted in lower service budgets for many people. The seven percent cut to Medicaid services in Minnesota is also a factor in the decision to merge.

The merger is a sign of the times in Minnesota’s disability community. Over the past several years agencies have combined to provide programs and services in the face of a challenging fundraising climate. The most recent merger was completed last month when East Suburban Resources (ESR) merged with Rise, Inc.

Rise added 155 team members and began serving an additional 800 people last year as a result of the merger.

ESR, a nonprofit agency which provided services to people throughout Washington County, Minnesota, and St. Croix County, Wisconsin, officially became a subsidiary of Rise on July 1, 2018. The two agencies transitioned into a full merger by January 2019.

After more than 40 years of working in the vocational rehabilitation field, Ed Breeze, ESR’s executive director, retired July 1, 2018. He is, however, working part-time through the end of the year to help with the merger process. The ESR Board studied its options for a few months before opting to join forces with Rise.

The Arc Minnesota’s current configuration is another high-profile change. On January 1, 2018, chapters across Minnesota merged as one organization to provide consistent and essential services to support more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

According to a letter sent out by ALLY President and CEO Bob Brick, ALLY and CIP leaders have been meeting to discuss how a merger can help clients of both agencies reach their goals. Discussions between leaders of the two agencies helped determine that ALLY and CIP share the same philosophies in helping their clients succeed. More information about the merger will be announced in the future.

The merger will affect several hundred clients. “We are confident that with our shared values and more than 100 years’ of combined experience, ALLY and CIP will be able to increase opportunities for new or expanded services and stronger advocacy for the people we serve,” Brick said.

ALLY People Solutions, which is based in St. Paul, has provided services to people with disabilities for more than 50 years. It provides support and employment services to people with mental health and people with intellectual disabilities, along with opportunities for recreation and volunteer activities. It also helps employers find workers.

It was created in 1965 by families with adult children with intellectual disabilities. The Arc has new leader

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Frances Wright

"Equality is the soul of liberty; there is, in fact, no liberty without it."

Frances Wright
It seemed as though our winter was going to be very mild but then the end of January really hit hard, with crazy record-breaking cold all over the state, followed by a beautiful warm weekend and then back to normal Minnesota February temperatures. I heard a report that lake ice is very unstable this year. Even the ice doesn’t like all these ups and downs.

There was new data released from United Cerebral Palsy and the ANCOR (the American Network of Community Options and Resources) in their Case for Inclusion in 2019. The annual report grades Medicaid programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia on how well they serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The results of the study dropped Minnesota down to 21st place in 2019 from 7th place in 2015. Minnesota’s worst categories were “reaching those in need” and “promoting independence,” where we ranked 45th and 35th.

Those categories were shocking to me because I thought these are areas where we’ve been improving. The study showed that Minnesota is also falling backwards in its Home and Community-Based Services for people with disabilities. “Lots of variables play into Minnesota’s ranking,” said Sue Schettke, CEO of the Association of Residential Providers in Minnesota, an association of more than 200 providers, businesses and advocates for people with disabilities. “The workforce shortages played the largest role in our state’s dip over the last few years.”

Minnesota’s Department of Human Services evaluations have shown that personal care assistants are the lowest paid workers in the HCBS core.

In Minnesota, there are three major groups working on legislation to address the wage crisis for Personal Care Assistance (PCA) workers. DFSC (Direct Support Personnel Support Fund); SEIU Healthcare Minnesota; and the PCA Reform Coalition.

Best Life Alliance, a statewide coalition of organizations, people with disabilities, families and supporters, was previously known as the 5% Campaign. Starting in 2014, the group pushed for a five-percent higher wage for staff that provide more complex care. Now the huge issue of the group is fighting is to reverse a devastating seven-percent cut in state reimbursement rates that remained when then-Gov. Mark Dayton vetoed the omnibus bill a year ago. There were many reasons for Dayton to have vetoed that bill, but unfortunately that meant that the legislature’s funding cut remained in the final budget.

SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, the union that represents many PCAs and DSPs, has a two-year, tentative agreement that won’t be shared until all union members vote and approve, but the union said highlights include, “funding so reimbursement rates and client budgets will go up 2.37% for everyone, with those making the minimum wage getting a 4.1% wage increase from $12 to $13.25; $750,000 for trainings and orientation to help workers gain and build skills, increased paid time off, and an additional increase in wages for workers serving clients who need the highest hours of care.” If the union votes in favor and the legislature votes in favor and the governor accepts the agreement, it will start July 2019.

The PCA Reform Coalition it consists of disability advocates, PCA agencies, and other human services providers in Minnesota using input from DFSC, they are trying to build a formulation that would eventually adopt. It explains that the experiences are about education and the wilderness. People with disabilities were included as a group that could not be served over Boundary Waters management and whether motorized transportation should be used there. In 1977 then-Sen. Wendell Anderson (D-Minnesota) was made the statement that “the handicapped, elderly and women” would never be able to enjoy the area without the use of motors.

At the time, Laos’ sister Mary worked for what was then the Minnesota State Board of Health. She called her brother to suggest that they give it a try and contact Anderson.

In an effort to demonstrate that anyone can enjoy the wilderness on its own terms, Laos and college pal Paul Schude organized a trip to the Boundary Waters in 1977. Deaf people and people using wheelchairs were among the group. That trip opened new possibilities and changed the lives of everyone involved. As Laos recalled: “I’ll never forget watching Margot Anderson, my first berthmate, drag her wheelchair to prove to herself that she could do it. It blew me away, and put my issues and worries in perspective. I learned then to keep an open mind and never say never!”

Wilderness Inquiry was formally incorporated in 1978, with help from Greg and Mary’s father, Don Laos. Several programs began under the Wilderness Inquiry umbrella, including programs to provide outdoor experiences for youth and adults with cognitive and physical disabilities.

Over the years Wilderness Inquiry built a reputation for inclusive outdoor adventures and other trips around the world. It has grown from a Minneapolis garage to its own office and warehouse, and a base camp at Little Sand Bay near the Apostle Islands. Since the beginning, Wilderness Inquiry has served almost 400,000 people who are blind or visually impaired, hiking, dog-sledding, ski, horse-pack and safari adventures throughout North America and the world.

Many things have changed since three friends and a group of students made that first trip to the Boundary Waters together, but the spirit, care and sense of adventure continues throughout Wilderness Inquiry programs to this day—whether in Alaska, East Africa or the Bronx. Learn more about Wilderness Inquiry at www.wildernessinquiry.org.
Minnesota drops rank in new inclusion report

Stagnant or declining investments in state programs that help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities lead more independent and productive lives have resulted in Minnesota dropping from 7th place in 2015 to 21st place today in state rankings, according to the Case for Inclusion 2019. The report is compiled by the ANCOR Foundation and United Cerebral Palsy (UCP).

The report, The Case for Inclusion 2019, ranks all 50 states and the District of Columbia on how well state programs, primarily Medicaid, serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The states are ranked in five key areas critical to the inclusion, support, and empowerment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

The five areas are promoting independence, providing financial assistance, improving the quality of life, serving those in need, and tracking health, safety and quality of life.

“This report should be a wake-up call for policymakers and community leaders in Minnesota. Minnesota is still working to achieve this ideal,” the report stated. “Without the professional staff, training, and daily personal support of the frontline workers who help those with disabilities integrate into the community, the future of Minnesota’s workforce crisis may be the most significant challenge we face in improving the outcomes tracked by the annual Case for Inclusion,” said Frank Perl, CEO and ANCOR Foundation CEO Barbara Merrill.

“Without the professional staff, training, and daily personal support of the frontline workers who help those with disabilities integrate into the community, the future of Minnesota’s workforce crisis may be the most significant challenge we face in improving the outcomes tracked by the annual Case for Inclusion,” said Frank Perl, CEO and ANCOR Foundation CEO Barbara Merrill.

“I believe this is an opportunity for the state and federal leaders to commit to the future of Minnesota’s workforce crisis by increasing funding for the programs and services that help those with disabilities integrate into the community,” Perl said. “This is not a new issue, but a problem that has been ignored for too long.”

In Minnesota, providers report an average DSP vacancy rate of 15 percent or approximately 10,000 positions, and annual DSP turnover rates of more than 50 percent. The same time, the Minnesota unemployment rate among the lowest in the country, at 2.8 percent.

Armando Contreras, President and CEO of UCP, noted that across the “our state, we see positive signs that policymakers are starting to recognize the importance of Medicaid and services and related programs by making the best use of existing and scarce resources.”

Of course, funding is key to improving the outcomes tracked by the annual Case for Inclusion, the report stated. “Without the professional staff, training, and daily personal support of the frontline workers who help those with disabilities integrate into the community, the future of Minnesota’s workforce crisis may be the most significant challenge we face in improving the outcomes tracked by the annual Case for Inclusion.”

The full Case for Inclusion 2019 report, along with scorecards for each state, and additional resources can be downloaded at caseforinclusion.org.

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We look forward to hearing from you! Please call 612-726-9341.
Many partners will solve direct support workforce shortage

by Claire Wilson, Alex Bartolic

DHS, along with other state agencies, is playing a significant role in implementing the plan and also has been working for years on strategies to ensure people with disabilities live, work and enjoy life in ways meaningful to them.

Increasing worker wages and benefits is the first strategy listed in the plan. This action could require legislative action with support from people with disabilities, advocacy organizations, providers and direct support professionals themselves. DHS and our partners are laying the groundwork for support professionals themselves. DHS, along with other state agencies, is playing a significant role in implementing the plan and also has been working for years on strategies to ensure people with disabilities live, work and enjoy life in ways meaningful to them.

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By Deb Taylor

Age, disability can be factors in isolation

Think about the most meaningful relationships in your life. What do they add to your experiences? How do they embody your sense of purpose? The idea of having those relationships slowly fade or be taken away is heartbreaking, but nonetheless a reality for millions of older Americans, who find themselves feeling isolated and alone on a daily basis.

Loneliness is a slippery slope for older adults and for people with disabilities. Changes in life as they age may begin to build upon one another and leave them feeling alone and forgotten about; like they don’t belong. The realities of aging and disability may mean they are despondent from the loss of a spouse or friend. Or that they may be alienated as a result of a chronic health condition, limited mobility, failing memory or hearing loss. A fear of falling or driving can keep people confined to their homes. These physical limitations can greatly inflame feelings of isolation. Reported loneliness numbers are even greater in the aging LGBTQ+ population. No matter the cause, millions of older adults find themselves socially isolated, leading them to feel pushed aside and rejected.

One such term to describe this phenomenon is an “elder orphan.” That may sound like a grim label and invoke extreme imagery, but when we really take a closer look at these situations, it really isn’t an exaggeration. These are older adults with no spouse, either no close relatives or no contact with family, and no significant connections to their communities, leading them to feel they don’t belong anywhere. Meaning comes from connecting and contributing to something beyond the self. A large part of the way we construct our sense of identity is our relation to other people; what we share of ourselves, how we interact with others, our shared experiences with them. The consequences of weakening or taking away these relations can be devastating not just emotionally, but also physically.

A University of California, San Francisco study found that participants 60 years old and older who reported feeling lonely saw a 45 percent increase in their risk of death. Isolated survey respondents also had a 59 percent greater risk of mental and physical decline than their more social counterparts. Studies like these suggest it’s not enough to simply be physically healthy-to have your bodily functions working properly- you need to foster meaningful relationships that will ultimately give you a sense of belonging and purpose. We all need a “why” to get us through the good and bad. For most people, the largest part of that “why” is the people in our lives who matter to us.

So how can we combat loneliness?

It starts with the recognition that we all are susceptible to social isolation and loneliness as our lives inevitably change. It starts with a conversation.

The key to addressing loneliness is listening closely, observing vigilantly. We have to encourage one another to share what we’re thinking and feeling. There’s a stigma of loneliness being seen as weakness. As Americans, we have deeply embedded values of individualism and self-reliance, especially in older generations. This can sometimes mean hesitating to reach out for help. But we need to start addressing social isolation and loneliness the way we would a heart problem or any other health risk, because it is one.

Only then can a plan be developed to help each other to better connect—from finding social groups at senior centers to using online resources of support. At all ages, we need to create and maintain meaningful ties to one another as we grow older. To truly make the physical spaces we reside in impactful communities, we need to find ways to emotionally invest in the places we live; through participation in community outings to simply getting to know your neighbor. After all, no one deserves to feel like they don’t belong anywhere.

Deb Taylor is the CEO of Senior Community Services and its Reimagine Aging Institute, a nonprofit that helps older adults and caregivers navigate aging to maintain independence and quality of life. We provide a wide array of programs—www.seniorcommunity.org.

YOUR LETTERS ARE WELCOME

Access Press welcomes letters to the editor and commentary pieces from readers, on topics of interest to Minnesota’s disability community. Letters should be no more than 500 words, with 750 words per commentary. Ask the editors if more space is needed.

Letters and guest commentaries must be signed by the authors or authors.

Letters and guest commentaries must be specific to topics of interest to Minnesota’s disability community. The editors have questions about a letter or commentary but aren’t required.

requests that the newspaper do so. Pictures with publication the following month.

Your idea or ask questions about a letter or commentary. Contact information isn’t published unless the writer specifically requests that the newspaper do so. Pictures of the author can be published with a guest commentary but aren’t required.

Access Press asks that letters and guest commentaries be specifically written for the newspaper. Letters must have a focus on disability issues and ideally, a focus on those issues as they affect Minnesota. Form letters will not be published.

Because Access Press is a non-profit publication and must follow regulations on political partisanship, political endorsement letters are not published. That is true for candidates’ endorsements as well as for ballot questions.

Before making a submission writers are always encouraged to contact the newspaper to discuss ideas or to ask questions about From Our Community submissions, at 651-644-2133 or access@accesspress.org. Let the newspaper staff know if accommodations are needed to submit a letter or commentary.

Letters and commentaries reflect the view of the authors and not the views of the staff and board of directors of Access Press.

Deadline for the print edition of the newspaper is the 25th of each month, with publication the following month.
Returning, new leaders named

A familiar name and two newcomers are leading state departments that extensively deal with people with disabilities. Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan named state department commissioners in January, including Jan Malcolm at the Department of Human Services, Jan Malcolm at Department of Health and Ret roce Lucore at Department of Human Rights.

Malcolm, 63, has served as commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Health in now three administrations, including Gov. Jesse Ventura (1999-2003) and Gov. Mark Dayton (2018). A nationally recognized expert in public health, she previously worked at a variety of health care organizations and nonprofit organizations and served as adjunct faculty at the University of Minnesota.

Walz praised Malcolm for her “proven track record at taking on management challenges and making meaningful changes,” he added. “She mirrors our vision for health equity across the state, and we are glad to have her experience and expertise in our administration.”

“The health of Minnesotans is one of our government’s primary concerns. Thanks to our state’s strong public health and health care systems, we have a good foundation on which to build, but we can do better,” said Malcolm. “The Walks’ leadership, combined with Tony for One Minnesota means making the system more affordable and closing the gap in lives in need of care today, based on many factors, including race and geography.”

Changes seen in abuse cases

A northern Minnesota care facility where a vulnerable adult is believed to have been subjected to a fatal beating recently revealed levels of violence against residents, as well as repeated violations of state rules.

In early November, state health investigators arrived at Chappy’s Golden Shores, a small assisted-living facility in northwestern Grand Rapids. Complaints of maltreatment revealed levels of violence against residents, as well as repeated violations of state rules.

The facility license was quickly suspended, and the remaining 39 residents relocated.

The response reflects change at the state health department, which has been working to improve efforts to protect vulnerable Minnesota in care facilities.

The effort was spurred in part by an investigative series by the Star Tribune and a scathing report by the legislative auditor.

“I’ve never seen the [Health Department] come down this quickly and this forcefully on the side of protecting our vulnerable adults and the elderly,” said Sen. Jim Abeler, R-Brooklyn Park, chairman of the Senate Health and Human Services Reform Committee. “There was an urgency here that we haven’t seen in the past.”

After taking over, Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm overhauled the agency’s system for responding to and investigating allegations, eliminating a vast backlog of never investigated cases while speeding up the pace of new investigations. That has produced positive results, more than doubling the number of maltreatment investigations it completes annually, and is conducting them at a much faster pace. Each allegation of maltreatment is examined within two days, and the average time to complete investigations has dropped by nearly half, from 187 days in 2017 to 110 days in 2018, state officials said.

“The progress is very real,” Malcolm said in an interview. “We feel much more confident today that when serious issues are brought to our attention, that we spot them and are able to get to them much quicker.”

Although advocates are pushing for more progress, the thorough nature of recent investigations has drawn praise. That includes the scrutiny of Chappy’s.

Lourey was named to his post after engagement with stakeholders and partners. Walz praised Lourey for his unparalleled experience on the health department budget and his collaborative leadership.

“It is a tremendous honor and privilege to join the incoming Walz-Flanagan Administration as Commissioner of the Department of Human Services,” said Lourey. “I look forward to building on the Walz-Flanagan vision for One Minnesota, partnering with communities, tribes, and providers to improve the health of the people, families, and communities across Minnesota.”

Lourey, 51, was raised in the small town of Bigfork. He worked as a public policy consultant for 20 years, assisting county and state governments nationwide. He served as a Kerrick Township Supervisor for nine years.

Lourey was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 2006 and quickly became a leading voice in health and human services as the chair of the Health and Human Services Finance Committee from 2013 to 2016. He played a central role in Minnesota’s efforts to expand health care coverage, comply with the Affordable Care Act, and improvements upon the bipartian success of the Medical Home and Economic Development. (Source: Minnesota governor’s office)

Teacher suspended for behavior

A St. Paul special education teacher was suspended for seven days forosh behavior and was not reemployed, according to reports on her students on Instagram. Kjerstin Hagen was hired in 2012 and teaches students with intellectual disabilities at a Minneapolis Indian Magnet School.

For each child on her caseload, Hagen works with students and families to deal with, the group is building on the work of the state task force that disbanded in 2014. The current council was formed last fall as an advisory group for the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The noncompliance included “inaccurate information, substantial documentation, programming errors (and) out of date IEPs,” she said the letter signed by Theresa Battle, interim special education director. Hagen also published Instagram posts that referred to her students in a demeaning manner and posted ‘student assignments which contain inappropriate content.”

Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available on Apple iOS, Android smartphone, and tablet, is a popular tool that can help promote your business. We can upload photos or videos to the service and share them with your followers or with a select group of users.

Vaccines part of debate

Autism activists are concerned that the appointment of vaccine skeptics to a newly formed state council gives credibility to views the state has struggled to dispel. The Minnesota Council was formed last fall as an advisory group for the school’s role.

Doctors have widely concluded that vaccines, like the one for measles, mumps, and rubella, are not linked to autism. The World Health Organization list published includes vaccine hesitancy as one of the greatest threats to global health in 2019, and notes measles cases have increased fivefold worldwide.

Two of the more than 30 members on the council are known vaccine skeptics. Anti-vaccination groups have formed based on Minnesota’s Somali-American community in the past as they tried to perpetuate the harmful vaccine myths, which are contributing to a drop in vaccinations and the largest measles outbreak in the state’s recent history.

“Even if it’s not something that’s discussed or that a policy is going to come out of, giving them this large advisory council on this issue is dangerous. It’s giving credence to a theory that’s false,” said council member Noah McCourt, an autism self-advocate who also serves on the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Disabilities.

But autism council members also are members of “a vaccine safety council” run by the Minnesota Department of Health, which advocates for vaccine education and defense of the choice to not vaccinate children. But they have also said that discussion won’t take place at the council.

The council has started meeting, with regular attendance by health care workers and students on Instagram. Kjerstin Hagen was hired in 2012 and teaches students with intellectual disabilities at a Minneapolis Indian Magnet School.

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Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available on Apple iOS, Android smartphone, and tablet, is a popular tool that can help promote your business. We can upload photos or videos to the service and share them with your followers or with a select group of users.
True Friends, which provides an array of experiences for people of all abilities, has received a $100,000 donation from the Norman C. Skalicky Foundation and Stearns Bank to benefit its general operations.

"This generous gift from the Norman C. Skalicky Foundation and Stearns Bank makes it possible to carry on our mission of high quality, personalized care to our clients," said John LeBlanc, President and CEO of True Friends. "I know our clients and board of directors are very thankful for this gift."

Beyond keeping the lights on, general operations at True Friends supports program development and critical infrastructure initiatives to provide exceptional care for individuals participating in camp, respite, horse therapy and travel services.

"Stearns Bank has always been passionate about giving back to the community, even more so to those needing a helping hand," Norman Skalicky said. "The work of True Friends to enhance self-esteem and independence aligns well with our mission to help foster growth and success."

While True Friends programs provide life-changing experiences for our participants, programs also offer caregivers a moment of respite; a chance to rest and to relieve the stress that sometimes occurs while caring for individuals with special needs. With locations near Maple Lake, Annandale, Plymouth, Eden Prairie and Bemidji, True Friends serves individuals in Minnesota and throughout the United States.

True Friends benefit from generous gift...because everyone has the right to be empowered.
King day celebration includes disability focus

Minnesota’s 33rd annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration was held in St. Paul at the Ordway Theater. A large crowd was on hand to enjoy performances and speeches, and honor award winners. Mae Jemison, a NASA astronaut for six years, was keynote speaker. She was the first woman of color in the world to travel to space. In addition to honoring King’s legacy, the event celebrated women of color in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Chemist and philanthropist Reatha Clark King received the Governor’s Civil Rights Legend Award, while Katherine Coleman Johnson, a NASA research mathematician, received the Governor’s Equity and Justice Legacy Award. Several elected officials spoke, and everyone enjoyed music and dance.

The event is run every year by a committee, with help from groups including groups and commissioners for people with disability. The entire event was accessible, with accommodations offered for people who have visual disabilities and who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing. One of the groups involved is the Minneapolis/St. Paul Black Deaf Advocates.

Shriners Hospital Minneapolis for sale

The 10-acre Shriners Hospital Minneapolis campus is for sale. The listing was announced in February. It’s part of a transition for Shriners’ Twin Cities operation as it moves from traditional hospital to outpatient care. The Twin Cities office of Colliers International has listed the property.

Shriners is in southeast Minneapolis along East River Parkway, near the border with St. Paul. It is just south of Interstate 94. The campus overlooks the Mississippi River. A new owner could use the current buildings or demolish them. The property is in a residential neighborhood with a mix of single-family and multi-family homes.

A sale and move will be the end of an era for Shriners, which opened a hospital at the location in 1923. The current facilities date from 1991 and include a conference center, small hotel and skyway-connected parking ramp with 172 spaces. There is also an auditorium, operating rooms and even a small prosthetics factory.

Putting the property up for sale is the latest change for Shriners, which laid off more than 60 staff members in September 2018. The plan is to move to a smaller building, keeping the current location open until a move is made. The hospital itself has 104,000 square feet of space, with two operating rooms and 19 inpatient rooms.

Shriners Hospitals for Children is a network of 22 non-profit medical facilities across North America. Children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, and cleft lip and palate are eligible for care and receive all services, regardless of the patients’ ability to pay.

Hospitals are owned and operated by Shriners International, a Freemasonry-related organization whose members are known as Shriners. Patients must be minors under the age of 18 and are not required to have any familial affiliation with the Shriners order nor Freemasonry.

Hennepin Health

Coverage that brings us together

Hennepin Health-SNBC offers eligible Hennepin County residents who are living with disabilities medical benefits and personalized care coordination services.

612-596-1036 www.hennepinhealth.org

DHS approved 1/21/2017
The Arc Minnesota names new CEO

The Arc Minnesota has announced that Andrea Zuber will become its new chief executive officer, effective February 19. The Arc Minnesota Board of Directors confirmed the new leader at its January board meeting. Zuber will provide executive leadership, vision, and strategic direction for the nonprofit to provide consistent, essential services to support more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families throughout Minnesota.

“The Arc Minnesota Board is excited to welcome Andrea Zuber as our new CEO based on her demonstrated ability to lead change that makes an impact,” said Mike Wall, board chairman. “We look forward to her leadership as we work together to remove barriers and increase access to opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families throughout the state.”

Zuber is currently director of social services for Dakota County. She has spent her entire career leading the development and delivery of social services with extensive experience in transforming support for people with disabilities and their families.

As a county department director, she championed full inclusion for people with disabilities and people with mental health challenges, integrated employment and housing, and was recognized as a sponsor and leader in the implementation of diversity, inclusion and equity work. Her 22 years of experience in the disability field includes leadership roles at the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Ramsey County and Arc Great Rivers. She has been actively engaged in partnerships and collaborations based on her experience with organizations that support inclusion for people with disabilities including People First Minnesota and the Minnesota Disability Law Center Citizens Advisory Council. She served on the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration Citizens Advisory Council, the Minnesota Employment First Coalition, and was engaged in efforts related to the development and implementation of the Minnesota Olmstead Plan.

“It is an honor and a privilege to lead The Arc Minnesota at this time,” said Zuber. “Working together with all who believe in a bright future for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, we will be committed to creating hope, connections, and opportunities to support all Minnesotans plan for and live their best lives.”

The Arc Minnesota provides services to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Nine groups get access grants

Nine Twin Cities arts organizations were awarded ADA Access Improvement Grants by VSA Minnesota. The nonprofits will use the grants, totaling $82,635, to make arts programs more accessible to people with disabilities. Since 2010, 149 projects by 76 different organizations have now been funded, totaling $1,705,635.

VSA Minnesota has administered the ADA Access Improvement Grant program since 2010 for the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC). MRAC will administer the program after VSA ceases operations in September. The purpose is to enable nonprofit arts organizations in the seven-county Twin Cities area to improve their programs, projects, equipment, or facilities in ways that have the potential for significant or long-term impact in involving more people with disabilities as participants or patrons in arts programs.

Art Works Eagan, Eagan, was awarded $15,000 to install automatic door openers for six to eight strategically targeted doors in its facility. The project successfully concluded.


Get Help with Your Heat & Energy Bills!

No family should go without heat in the winter. Community Action Partnership of Suburban Hennepin can help. CAPSH's Energy Assistance Program provides financial assistance to Hennepin County residents, including the City of Minneapolis, to help with home energy costs.

We encourage you to request an application if either of the following is true:

• You do not have enough money to meet your basic needs.
• You are currently in danger of being disconnected by your heat or electric company.

Call 800-466-7722
TTY/TDD 800-627-3529
www.accessiblespace.org

Housing with Care*

- 24-hour Assisted Living Services • Independent Living Services • Resident Community Setting (Adult Foster Care)

*Eligibility for or selection of ASI services is not required to qualify for housing. ASI services are not available in all locations.

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Best Life Alliance has been a presence at the capitol for the past few years, working for a rate increase.

RALLIES

From page 1


The event starts at 9 a.m. with check in and registration at the Department of Transportation cafeteria. That’s followed at 9:30 by a brief training on issues and advocacy. Poster-making and tabling starts at 10 a.m., with the march and roll to the capitol at 10:30 a.m.

A rally in the capitol rotunda is to start at 11 a.m. and last until 11:45 a.m.

Those who attend the event are encouraged to set up meetings with House and Senate members from their home districts, and to work with legislators’ staff to get even a few minutes of time. Disability Day volunteers will be available to help people get to meeting and provide other support.

The Arc Minnesota can answer questions about the event. Call Gene Martinez at 952-902-0855 or email genemartinez@arcminnesota.org. The deadline for requesting accommodations was February 5, but check to see what is available.

Other sponsors as of Access Press deadline are ACCRA, Advocating Change Together (ACT), Autism Society of Minnesota, Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota, Lifeworks, Metropolitan Center for Independent Living, Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance, Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, Minnesota Council on Disability and Proof Alliance. Proof Alliance is the new name for Minnesota organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (MOFAS).

Check the sponsors’ web pages for additional information on Disability Day.

Another big legislative event is ARRM/MOHR Disability Services Day at the Capitol, which is Tuesday, March 12. The capitol rotunda rally is at 10 a.m. The two organizations join forces each year to support community-based services for people with disabilities. The rally draws people from around Minnesota. Look for more information on the websites, www.armm.org or www.mohrm.org.

Registration forms are due by Friday, February 15. The sponsoring organizations will be coordinating meetings with state lawmakers, and will have a coat and break room available in the state Office Building. Mental Health day on the Hill also brings together organizations that advocate for children and adults living with mental illnesses and their families. This event is 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Thursday, March 14. Buses from around the state will arrive in St. Paul, filled with advocates to make the case for supports and services.

An informational briefing at 9:30 a.m. will be followed by a rally from 11 a.m. until noon. Visits to legislators follow the rally. For questions Sam Smith at NAMI Minnesota is one of the contacts, at 651-645-2948 ext. 107 or ssmith@namimn.org.

Other groups will also have events and rallies. Several groups are sponsoring Tuesdays at the Capitol through March. The rally draws people from around Minnesota. Look for more information on Disability Day.

Rallies and other events are also publicized on websites and Facebook pages, and on social media for organizations that advocate for children and adults living with mental illnesses and their families. This event is 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Thursday, March 14. Buses from around the state will arrive in St. Paul, filled with advocates to make the case for supports and services.

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New home sought for arts calendar

VSA Minnesota's announcement that it will shut down at the end of September means that its arts and disability-related programs need new stewards. Although some grant and education programs have found new homes, one program with an uncertain future is the arts calendar. A version of this calendar appears every month in Access Press.

The calendar is an important resource, not just to Access Press readers but to all who appreciate arts accessibility. VSA Minnesota prominently features the calendar on its website. The calendar provides information about accessible performances, including specific accommodations, ticket prices, performance time and dates, and information on the performances themselves.

The calendar is a useful resource for anyone trying to plan an evening or afternoon out. It includes events and activities for all ages. It would be a loss to Minnesotans with disabilities if the calendar didn't continue. Access Press would use a substitute calendar but doesn't have the staff capacity to take on the calendar as a project.

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Any organization interested in continuing the calendar should contact VSA Minnesota at 612-332-3888, or info@vsamn.org.
OPPORTUNITIES

The Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD) is seeking hosts for Disability Day at the Capitol during the 2019 legislative session. Being a day sponsor is a MNCCD member benefit with no additional cost. Day at the Capitol is held 9:30-11 a.m. Tuesdays in the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cafeteria. There is a chance if food and beverages are desired. MNCCD members are on hand to provide a briefing on current disability policy issues, information on their work with citizens, assistance with getting legislative offices, and assistance for anyone wishing to make a sign or tell a personal story. Stories can be powerful and effective in conveying a message.

As of Access Press deadline, open dates included Feb. 12, March 19, April 10, 16, and 23, and May 14. Days are held whether or not there is a sponsor but why not take advantage if food and beverages are desired. MNCCD members are on hand to provide a briefing on current disability policy issues, information on their work with citizens, assistance with getting legislative offices, and assistance for anyone wishing to make a sign or tell a personal story. Stories can be powerful and effective in conveying a message.

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On a cold winter day, a trip to the movies can be a welcome respite. But be aware there have been changes in Minnesota's accessible film offerings.

The IMAX theater at the Minnesota Zoo in Apple Valley closed at the end of January. The zoo's 500-seat immersive 3D theater opened in 1997. The zoo's IMAX theater is owned by a group of private investors affiliated with other IMAX theaters. As of now it's not known what will happen to the theater space.

In the meantime, the Science Museum of Minnesota Omni theater still offers the immersive movie experience enjoyed by IMAX fans. The museum and theater are at 120 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul. Tickets are $9.95 adults, $8.95 senior age 65 and older, and children ages 4-12. For online ordering add a $3 service fee. Access features of films include captioning, audio description, amplification, Spanish alternate language (via headset) and large print script.

The Greatest Places, Living in the Age of Airplanes, Journey to Space, Tornado Alley and National Parks Adventure are among the films now playing. The Greatest Places, Tornado Alley and Journey to Space end Feb. 28. FF: 651-224-9040. The museum is open Sun., Tue., Wed., 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Thurs.-Fri-Sat: 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Closed Mon.

Here's a guide to additional theater accommodations from VSA Minnesota:

For more information, check ahead before planning a trip. Almost all theaters now have some area for wheelchair or power scooter seating, as well as комфортное помещение, where patrons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing use transparent acrylic panels attached to their seats to reflect the captions, so they appear on the screen. The reflective panels are portable and adjustable, enabling the caption user to sit anywhere in the theater without bothering patrons in surrounding seats.

DVS Theatrical presents concise descriptive narration of visual cues, including actions, settings, scene changes, facial expressions and silent movement, through an FM or infrared system, making movies more meaningful to people with vision loss. The Moviooheh hears the narration on a headset without disturbing other audience members and at no extra cost.

CaptionView closed caption viewing systems allow moviegoers to read movie dialogue from the comfort of their seat anywhere in the auditorium.

Digital Theatre Systems or DTS superimposes open-captions over the bottom of movie theater screens.

Fidelio is a wireless audio system that delivers descriptive narration for people with vision loss and amplified sound for people with hearing loss. Patrons can get a compact audio receiver with a plug-in headset at the box office or by borrowing one's own headset. Descriptive narration and closed captioning availability are subject to the content made available from distributors.

Other websites outline additional options. Captionfish, at www.captionfish.com, can help moviegoers find captioned films by city. The American Council of the Blind has an Audio Description Project to enhance movies as well as museums, national parks and live events. It includes many links to audio-described DVDs, Blu-ray discs, television programs and more. Visit www.acb.org for more information.

Here's a list of movie theater access options, from VSA Minnesota and the theaters themselves:

Landmark Theaters has three theaters in Minneapolis, EastCinemas, 3911 W. 50th St., Edina, 952-920-8796; Uptown Theatre, 2906 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis, 612-823-3005 and Lagoon Cinema: 1230 Lagoon Ave., Minneapolis, 612-823-3020. At the downtown Regal Cinemas, Minneapolis offers CaptionView and Fidelio. FF: www.landmarktheatres.com

AMC Theaters offer assisted listening devices available at all of its theaters, according to the main AMC website. Some theaters offer CaptionView and Fidelio.

The Roserville and Eden Prairie theaters offer monthly sensory film experiences through the national Autism Society.

AMC Eden Prairie Mall 18 Theatres, 8251 Flying Cloud Drive Suite 4000, Eden Prairie Shopping Center Park in upper level lot between Sears and Kohl's. Accessible films are in Auditorium 7 FF: 952-656-0001, movie times, 888-262-4386.

AMC Showplace Inver Grove 16, 5567 Bishop Ave., Inver Grove Heights, has generally offered open-captioned films Wed.-Thu. FF: 651-453-1916; movie times, 1-888-262-4386.

AMC Rosedale 14 Theatres, 850 Rosedale Center, Roseville. Accessible films are in Auditorium 14 FF: 651-604-9347, 1-888-262-4386, www.amctheatres.com

Marcus Theatres has theaters throughout Minnesota and other Midwest states. Marcus offers Landmark captioning, descriptive narration and assistive listening devices are available. Options vary by location. Marcus has assisted listening devices only in Minneapolis locations.

Marcus Oakdale Ultrascreen Cinemas, 5677 Hadley Ave. N., Oakdale, FF: 651-770-4994. This theater uses DTS to superimpose open-captioning over the bottom of select movies. Subscribe to an Open Captions weekly e-mail at the theater website.


Regal Cinemas is a national movie chain, with one theater in Minnesota. Go to www.regmovies.com to learn more.


Regal's longtime Brooklyn Center theater has closed. ShowPlace ICON has one Minnesota theater. ShowPlace ICON at West End, 1625 West End Blvd., St. Louis Park. It offers assistive listening devices, closed captioning and descriptive video services. FF: 763-515-1177, www.showplacenicol.com

Karrigan was bird lover, ACT volunteer

John R. Karrigan is remembered as a longtime supporter of and volunteer for the disability organization Advocating Change Together (ACT) and other groups. What some of his friends in the disability community might not know is that he was also a veteran bird watcher or “birder” and a writer about birds and nature.

Karrigan is survived by his long-time partner Bonnie R. Karrigan; his daughter, Katie Nicole K. Karrigan; and his grandchildren, Cora Karrigan and Nolan Karrigan.

Karrigan died in January after a 10-month battle with metastatic melanoma. He was 74 and lived in Minneapolis’ Powderhorn Park area.

A native of Donnelly, he spent his childhood and early teens in Minnesota and Wisconsin. His family moved to International Falls during his teen years. He was a life insurance salesman and enjoying many family activities.

Dennis W. Olson’s childhood bout with poliomyelitis led to wheelchair sports

A native of Donnelly, he spent his childhood and early teens in Minnesota and Wisconsin. His family moved to International Falls during his teen years. He was a life insurance salesman and enjoying many family activities.

Karrigan was bird lover, ACT volunteer

In Memoriam

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The Art of Me is a joint Interactive Center for the Arts-Merrick Inc. production. More information is in the Enjoy listings.

The Fix
Minnesota Opera presents a musical take on the 1981 Black Sox baseball scandal, at Orchestra Hall, 1111 Nicollet Mall, Mpls. Ads and OC offered 1:15 p.m. Sun, March 10; and 7:30 p.m. Sun, March 17. Tickets $12-$60. FFI: 612-371-5656, www.mnopera.org

Planetarium Show: Out of this World!
Brookings SD, 1650 S. Garnett Rd., Brookings. AD offered 11:30 a.m. Fri, March 8, and 1:00-2:00 p.m. Sat, March 9. Tickets $12-$22. Contact Box Office for details. FFI: 605-697-4161

Candide
VocalEssence and Theater Latte Da present the musical comedy of star-crossed lovers, at Cowles Center for the Performing Arts, 3600 Hennepin Ave., Mpls. Ads and AD offered 7:30 p.m. Fri, March 8; and 2:00 p.m. Sun, March 10. Tickets $35-$45. More information from www.vocalescence.org.

Tues with Morrie
Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre presents a story about the author of the best-selling novel, at Valley City State University Auditorium, 333th St. S., Fargo. Ads offered 7:30 p.m. Sat, March 2; and 2:00 p.m. Sun, March 3. Tickets $20-$22. Dotted lines can refer to a recently updated website calendar with all the ASL-interpreted, audio-described, captioned, pay-what-you-can performances and other information. Contact VSA Minnesota at 612-338-6131 or info@vsamn.org for details.

Enjoy! From page 11
floor rotations on the first Sun of the month at 1, except for community workshops, and increase access to the arts, at http://vsamn.org. The website has a comprehensive calendar at the upper right-hand corner of its homepage. For information on galleries and theater performances around the state join the Access to the Performing Arts email list at access@vsamn.org or call VSA Minnesota, 612-338-3888 or state wide 800-801-3883 (voice/TTY). To view a weekly listing of events in the Twin Cities just visit the Twin Cities WAVE page, and online or by phone. Or join as members for $9/month.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
AccessPress.com, 1111 2nd St. S., Mpls. For information on galleries and theater performances around the state join the Access to the Performing Arts email list at access@vsamn.org or call VSA Minnesota, 612-338-3888 or state wide 800-801-3883 (voice/TTY). To view a weekly listing of events in the Twin Cities just visit the Twin Cities WAVE page, and one month before performances. Stand-alone materials are available, and attending classes and audiences.

Enabling new audience members to become more accessible to all individuals.

LEVELS: Shaping: God Artistic Expressions of the Unknown

Learning about the intersections between performance form and content in Guthrie Theatre, 312 1st St. S., Mpls. Ads offered 7:30 p.m. Sun, March 10, and 2:00 p.m. Mon, March 11. The show allows for open captioning and audience members can customize their own captions in real time. Tickets $18-$38.

One Armed Bandit
Lyric Arts Main Street Stage, 420 E. Main St., Anoka. Tickets $15-$22. Contact Lyric Arts, 763-439-4747, for information on galleries and theater performances around the state join the Access to the Performing Arts email list at access@vsamn.org or call VSA Minnesota, 612-338-3888 or state wide 800-801-3883 (voice/TTY). To view a weekly listing of events in the Twin Cities just visit the Twin Cities WAVE page, and one month before performances. Stand-alone materials are available, and attending classes and audiences.

Enabling new audience members to become more accessible to all individuals.
With our 25 years of experience providing support to people with disabilities – we’ll help you navigate the different services and possibilities available to you. With PCA Choice – you have the option of choosing your own caregiver, including your friends and family members.

Call and ask about the possibilities!
Toll Free 866-935-3515 • Metro 952-935-3515
SERVING PEOPLE STATEWIDE
www.accracare.org

Coverage for all.

UCare has been de-complicating health plans for people of all abilities for more than 30 years. Get started at ucare.org
or call 800-707-1711 | TTY: 800-688-2534

people powered health plans