ADA All the Way
SSD employee Nancy Martin offers unique perspective on the Americans with Disabilities Act 20 years after its passing

“This is our Declaration of Independence Day.”

Those are the words that Nancy Martin, administrator for the Special School District Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program, used 20 years ago to describe her feelings about the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

As one of hundreds to witness the historic signing of the ADA in person on the White House lawn, Martin recalls a feeling of relief, joy and celebration.

“It was very emotional,” Martin said. “It’s an amazing part of our history, and to be there to witness it was truly an experience. There was much joy, laughter and tears on the White House lawn that day.”

July 26 marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the ADA, which protects people with disabilities from being discriminated against in the areas of employment, access to public facilities, transportation and communication.

As a local activist who was part of the grassroots effort to support the historic legislation, Martin was invited to witness the signing of the bill into law by President George H.W. Bush.

“I compare it to the fight of African-Americans living in the South during the Civil Rights movement,” Martin said. “But for people with disabilities, the law to guarantee our civil rights didn’t come until 1990.”

As a person with a physical disability, Martin has first-hand knowledge and awareness of the personal, social and environmental issues encountered by the disabled community. Martin, who was born with cerebral palsy, is one of nearly 50 million people living in the United States today with some type of long-lasting condition or disability. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people with disabilities make up 19.3 percent of the population nationwide — roughly one out of five people.

In 1990, Martin was working as director of independent living specialist for Paraquad, a local not-for-profit with a mission to empower people with disabilities to increase their independence. Realizing the importance of her trip to Washington D.C., Martin invited a representative from Paraquad’s Youth and Family Program to join her. Polly Tallarico, who was 16 at the time, said she was delighted to make the trip with Martin.

“It was so much of an experience,” said Tallarico, who has cerebral palsy. “It meant everyone would be treated the same. Because I was only 16, I didn’t think I was aware how important this legislation was at the time.”

Martin had a different perspective. Born in 1957, times were very different for her. She recalls overcoming hurdles to receive an education and learn to drive. She said the road has not always been easy.

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Neuwoehner student Theresa Ryan cheers with the Fontbonne Griffin during a men’s basketball game. SSD students who participate in job training at Fontbonne University played basketball during half time of the game for Special Olympics.
FOCUS ON YOUR CORE

Over the past year, the SSD community has spent a great deal of time talking about its core values — those central tenets that define who we are as an organization and how we should be serving our community. And in these discussions it became clear that trumping all other values is our central belief that all students can learn and succeed.

We have been recognizing and celebrating those student successes in the last couple of months at SSD.

In April, the Special Education Foundation and SSD came together to recognize the outstanding achievements of local students through the annual Commitment to Kids Banquet. Rosemary Zander awards were established in honor of the 20th anniversary of the ADA. Students received Rosemary Zander Awards for their tremendous achievements over the previous year. Others were honored with financial scholarships for college or summer camps.

The district also recognized the top students in more than 30 programs offered at North Technical and South Technical high schools. The “Top at Tech” honorees boast a long list of recognitions and will be attending colleges and universities around the country. Ken Ngyuen, a South Technical High school graduate, was also inducted into the Alumni Hall of Fame.

All the students have diverse achievements and varied journeys, but they have all become living proof of SSD’s central belief that all students can learn and succeed.

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM
COMMEMORATES ADA ANNIVERSARY

In honor of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Missouri History Museum is hosting an exhibit, Americans with Disabilities Act: 20 Years Later.

The one-year exhibit opened June 27 with a commemorative march and rally. The exhibit includes a 1,000-square-foot gallery installation examining life in St. Louis prior to the landmark legislation, the work of local disability rights advocates to secure the passage of the ADA, post-ADA societal changes and the challenges remaining.

Nancy Martin, who serves as an administrator of the SSD Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program, served as one of several advisors to the Missouri History Museum regarding the ADA exhibit.

“It’s an important part of our history, and it’s a great honor that the Missouri History Museum has chosen to commemorate it in such a way,” she said.

The kick-off event included keynote speaker Robert Silverstein. Silverstein is a principal in the law firm Powers, Sutter & Verville PC and director of the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy, where he directs actions of disability-related policy issues. For more than a decade, Silverstein served on the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy, where he was the behind-the-scenes architect of 20 bills enacted into law, including the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act.

The exhibit, which includes various disability programs, will be open throughout the year. For more information, call 314.746.4599 or visit the museum’s Web site at www.mohistory.org.

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM COMMEMORATES ADA ANNIVERSARY

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To read Nancy’s story in her own words, visit www.ssd.k12.mo.us/ada.html.

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ROSEMARY ZANDER AWARD WINNERS

Christina Allen, James Birchfield, Brandon Bridges, Julia Collins, Edward Connolly, Michael Cummings, Demetrius Davey, Jr., Katherine Effe, Andre Flann, Anson Kelly, Andrew Koehler, Dara Massey, Sarah McCoy, Brooke Nicholson, Lillian Opinsky, Katherine Paquette, Samantha Price, James Alexander Pugh, Addison Roskam, Nancy Steffon, Gary Steiner, Michael Withie

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

SAMMY GOLDMAN “LIVING BIG” CAMPERSHIP
Jack Fearn
ALISSON M. HAAKE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP
CorinaHyte White
SSD BOARD OF EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS
Dino Sallie, Scott Roth
BONNIGHME LIONS SCHOLARSHIPS
Robert Neal Mitchell II, James Alexander Pugh, Scott Roth
DIANNE ARBEITER SCHOLARSHIPS
Eddie Connolly, Eric Jenkins, Zachary Jodlowski, Jelynn Prilenski, Rachel Varner
CHRISTOPHER DAVIS SCHOLARSHIPS
Eric Davis, Katherine Koch
DAVID MCCLAIN SCHOLARSHIP
Angela Sinyee
LAURA K. SHERMAN LAUGHLIN SCHOLARSHIP
Barbara Hickomb
SPECIAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS
Thomas Jonathan Bottchere, George Collins, Margaret Mack, Dr. Imonn Perrell, Danny Williams

TOPS AT TECH AWARD WINNERS

Automotive Collision Repair: Asantee Turner, Bradley Hannel
Automotive Technology: Christopher Tallarico, Konor Neal, Mike Sacco
Bricklaying and Masonry: Nathan Huff
Broadcast Captioning and Court Reporting: Megan Gustave
Carpentry: Jessica Harvey, Ross Glick
Cosmetology: Fabiola Rainey-Bey, Chelsea Roane
Culinary Arts: Tanya Persley, Tessa Tempeney
Dental Assistant: Donisha kerry
Diecast Technology: Zach Pehr
Early Childhood Careers: Holly Schmidt, Jami Green
Electrical Trades: Joshua Joseph, Connor Jepson
Electronics & Robotics Engineering: Orion Kazmaer
Emergency Medical Technician: Jessica Chreuthen, C. Jake Snack
Fashion Design: Chaerl Taylor, Jayme Turnbough
Financial Services: Eric Monroe
Firefighting: Justin Godzik, Tom Milkin
Floor Layers Middle Apprentice: Edie Sabunco
General Construction Trades: Karin Griffin, Craig Ralph

GEOGRAPHICAL TECHNOLOGY

Deborah Ross, Brian Wetter

Graphic Communications – Printing: Canvas Edwards, Jenee Calb

Graphic Design: Canvas Jordan, Daxson Coleman

Health Sciences: Kelsey Robertson/Monte Peterson

Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning: Tim Conley, Jacob Gianotti

Homeland Security & Preparedness: John Gable, Ryan Orca

Hospitality, Tourism & Event Planning: Bianca Chiappello

Laboratory & Pharmacy Technician: Corinna White

Law Enforcement: John Lee, Andresa Schredt

Motorcycle Mechanics: Brandon Hagen, Taylor Byford

Network Administration: Cresize Networking Academy: Mike Jones, Justin Picked

Criminal Bradley

Precision Machining: Cameron Dozier, Carl Lommel

Turf Management & Landscape Design: Michael Fegar

Veterinary Assistant: Victoria West, Amanda Harris

Web & Computer Programming: George Collins, Than Do

Welding: Dylan Perkins, Paul McManus

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“When I turned 16, I dutifully went out and applied for jobs, but no one would hire me,” she said. But Martin said she never recognized herself as an activist. It wasn’t until she entered college that she realized something needed to be done.

She began by attending town hall meetings led by the late Justin Dart, an international disability rights advocate who crafted and spearheaded the passage of the ADA. During the meetings, Martin would give personal testimony regarding her experiences and why she and other citizens with disabilities needed a law to protect their civil rights.

During the ’80s, Martin volunteered her weekends and evenings at St. Louis city and county college campuses and public events. She collected hundreds of signatures in support of the ADA.

Martin said the passage of the ADA was truly a bi-partisan effort.

“Republicans and Democrats worked together,” she said. “It didn’t matter what your political party affiliation was. Disabilities don’t recognize you as Republican or Democrat. Disabilities don’t discriminate. They affect everyone.”

Martin, who uses a motorized scooter to help with her mobility, said she has seen changes since the ADA was enacted.

“People’s minds have changed,” she said. “You can take a jackhammer to put in curb cuts, but you can’t take a jackhammer to people’s opinions and minds. That’s where the true power of the ADA has come into play. It’s the general attitude change that has been remarkable.”

But both Tallarico and Martin say there is still more work to be done in the area of rights for people with disabilities. And just as Martin was a part of the disability rights movement 20 years ago, she will again be a part of shaping the future of the ADA.

Martin will again be traveling to Washington D.C. next month to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the ADA. She has been selected as a delegate to participate in the National Summit on Disability Policy. Martin is the only delegate from the state of Missouri invited to take part in the event.

“It’s truly an honor,” Martin said. “To live through the past 20 years and see the changes that have occurred is pretty phenomenal. To be a part of what the next 20 years will look like is exciting.”

The Augment issue of Special Edition will feature highlights from Nancy’s return visit to Washington.

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