

History Note – A look back through the pages of Access Press

by [Jane McClure](#) // May 9th, 2014

The story of disability in Minnesota, as told through the pages of *Access Press*, is one of victories and defeats, activism and awards. As the paper approaches its 25th year, it's worth a look back to see what topics and people were making the news in the paper's early days.

In May 1990 *Access Press* published its first issue. The paper described its mission as “an advocacy role for tens of thousands of previous under-represented Minnesotans—those with physical or mental disabilities.” Today's world of instantaneous communication makes it hard to remember how difficult getting the word out could be. In the pre-Internet days, communication was through a handful of advocacy group newsletters or phone calls. Getting people to mobilize around issues was a huge challenge. Some veteran activists may remember when they used phone trees, when people would call one another to get the word out. *Access Press* was a means of consolidating communications for the disability community.

The first issue included a congratulatory letter from Gov. Rudy Perpich, who wished founding Editor Charlie Smith good luck. The first-ever *Access Press* Directory of Organizations was published in that same issue. That quarterly feature of the newspaper and website continues today.

In the first issue the newspaper published a profile of Rep. Lee Greenfield, (DFL-Minneapolis), who was involved with key human service legislation over the previous 12 years. Greenfield was a strong advocate for the disability community and spent much of his legislative career immersed in human services issues. He retired from state office in 2000.

Another article in the first issue described the approaching vote in Congress on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). *Access Press* published a detailed summary of the proposed legislation. The newspaper followed the ADA's early days. Its passage in summer of 1990 was front-page news. “The bill is the most comprehensive anti-discrimination law to go into effect since the 1964 Civil Rights Act,” an article stated. “The ADA will bar discrimination in transportation, telecommunications, public accommodations and employment.”

While it's difficult to imagine life today without the ADA, some articles in the first issues of *Access Press* could just get a few updates and be reprinted as today's news. Early stories describe the difficulty of finding accessible public transit. Metro Transit buses were being equipped with lifts in 1990, but finding a bus with a lift could prove challenging. It would take 12 years to make the Twin Cities' bus system 100 percent accessible.

View early issues of the newspaper on www.accesspress.org/archives/

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