

## History Note: Marches, rallies draw attention to disability rights cause

by [Access Press Staff](#) // July 10th, 2017

July 26th is the 27th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). How will Minnesotans celebrate?

Many will take part in a march to the Minnesota capitol that day, which will be followed by a rally and program. Details are elsewhere in this issue of *Access Press*.

Marches and rallies have long been part of the disability rights movement, in Minnesota and around the world. Civil disobedience can be a very effective way to draw attention to a cause. It's not known when the first march for disability rights was held, but many marches predate the current disability rights movement's start in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Images have been preserved of some marches following World War II. Many servicemen and women sustained disabling injuries as a result of their wartime service. They were dismayed to return from wartime service, only to feel that government agencies turned their backs on them. One striking image is from a 1946 march by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. Many marchers were in wheelchairs. They carried signs stating *Keep Faith in Paralyzed Vets, Don't Break Promises* and *Don't Let Us Down!*

It's interesting to note that in these images, and other images from the 1940s through mid-1960s, marchers were often well-dressed. Men often wore suits and ties, and women wore dresses.

Marches and rallies over the years have marked Disability Pride Days, International Workers Days, the International Day of People with Disabilities, GLBT Pride and other events. Marches have focused on jobs, health care, transit, housing and inclusion.

One of the most high-profile marches and rallies was in spring 1990 when people with disabilities dramatically crawled up the U.S. Capitol steps. That protest dramatized the barriers that face people with disabilities and drew attention to the slow pace of federal legislation affecting people with disabilities. People from more than 30 states attended that action, which dramatized the fight to get the ADA passed.

Media accounts described the action and the impatience of advocates. "Two centuries is long enough for people with disabilities to wait before the constitutional promise of justice is kept," Justin W. Dart Jr., chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, told the rally. "If we have to come back, perhaps we'll simply stay until they pass [the bill]," said I. King Jordan, first deaf president of Gallaudet College for the Deaf.

Twenty-seven years later, community members are still marching and rallying for their rights.

---

*Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at [access@accesspress.org](mailto:access@accesspress.org) or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities..*