

Sound the Trumpets – Bringing those barriers down

by [Luther Granquist](#) // November 10th, 2010



The Minnesota Society for Crippled Children and Adults persuaded the 1963 Minnesota Legislature to pass, unanimously, a requirement that new buildings paid for by the state be accessible to persons with disabilities. This new law directed the state fire marshal to write rules for state-funded construction that were consistent with the 1961 American Standard Association Specifications for Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible to and Usable by the Physically Handicapped. New construction of these public buildings could not proceed until the fire marshal approved the plans and specifications in accordance with those standards.

This legislation grew out of the work of Henry Haverstock, Jr., an attorney who headed the Society's Architectural Barriers Committee, and Bob Schwanke, a public health educator implementing a grant the society received to survey architectural barriers. They had proposed a broader bill, introduced by Rep. Bob Christensen of St. Paul and Sen. Joe Josefson of Marshall, which also extended the fire marshal's authority to all publicly funded new construction and remodeling, added staff to the fire marshal's division and included a modest appropriation. These early advocates for accessibility had to wait until 1965 for the legislature to give the fire marshal rulemaking authority to include cities, counties and schools and to cover remodeling. Because the legislature still refused to provide additional staff and funding, the required rule which incorporated and expanded the American Standard Specifications, was not completed until 1969. In 1971 the legislature required municipalities to apply that rule to all new construction and remodeling except for single and two-family dwellings.

The society's advocates realized that laws and rules alone would not bring down barriers that denied persons with disabilities full access to our communities and the buildings in them. To promote barrier-free construction, whether required by law or not, the Architectural Barriers Committee gave awards each year to companies, organizations, or churches which planned and constructed accessible facilities. In late 1963 the committee also released a 22-minute film, *Sound the Trumpets*, which portrayed for city and county officials, architects, legislators, and the general public how thoughtless building design affected persons with physical disabilities. They

showed this film around the state and distributed it throughout the country and abroad. The film concluded with this call to action: “What is needed is a modern Joshua ... in fact many Joshuas and groups who can “Bring these walls tumbling down.”

Some more walls came tumbling down in 1978. As part of a law which moved enforcement of these provisions from the fire marshal to the Commissioner of Administration, the legislature required state agencies to hold meetings open to the public in accessible buildings and prohibited state agencies from leasing inaccessible buildings on a long-term basis. More work for advocates remained, however, for in that law, as in earlier versions, remodeling was not required solely to achieve accessibility.