

## ***Access Award Winners – 2017***

### **Paul Winske Awards**

***AMF Chicopee Lanes*** (291 Burnett Road, Chicopee) – Get your party started rolling balls down the lanes now that there is a ramp to access all 40 lanes at AMF Chicopee. Now folks with disabilities can participate in all the activities featured at the lanes (it's not just about bowling), as one more big barrier falls. We love to see this kind of commitment to full participation!

***Brightwood Branch Library*** (359 Plainfield Street, Springfield) – The Brightwood Branch Library in Springfield is located with the Chestnut Accelerated Middle School, but don't let that slow you down. The Library offers good physical access with parking, power entry doors, lowered service counters, and lowered book stacks. There's also a Community Room that really serves the whole community. But the staff here makes the real difference, offering cheerful and knowledgeable assistance and making visitors feel like friends. Computer access, books on tape and large print are available on site, and books and materials can be ordered and received from any other library in the Commonwealth.

***Center Square Grill*** (84 Center Square, East Longmeadow) – So here's a question. This is a wonderful restaurant with great food, but the bar seating area isn't accessible to folks using wheelchairs. So why are they getting an Access Award? Often accessibility goes beyond the physical environment, especially when other options for accommodations are possible. The creative staff at the Grill offers to seat customers in the dining room or even the outside patio area while still offering the same deals on appetizers and other pleasures. Nice.

***Central Rock Gym*** (165 Russell Street, Hadley) – If you're guessing that this place is about offering a variety of climbing experiences, you're right on the money. But if you're thinking there's no place for people with disabilities, you're wrong. There's a ramp leading to the rock-climbing wall, accessible restrooms, and a lift to the second floor. Beyond these physical features, Gym staff make sure that each visitor has as complete an experience as possible. Our Transition to Adulthood staff and kids have even done a couple of overnight parties there, with great physical challenges and bonding experiences. This Gym really rocks!

**Clifford A. Phaneuf Environmental Center – Forest Park** (1 Porter Lake Dam Road, Springfield) – Since 1970, the Environmental Center for Our Schools (or ECOS, as it is commonly called) has taken all Springfield public school students in grades four through seven on two-day environmental learning outings in beautiful Forest Park...but some kids with disabilities felt left out. No more! Now all students can visit the newly revamped Clifford A. Phaneuf Environmental Center for a wonderfully inclusive experience. In fact, persons of any age can visit and learn about the local ecology. Located directly on Porter Lake, improvements at the Center include ramps to the water's floating docks, easily navigable paths with an accessible picnic table, and zero-step entry to the building. Parking and rest rooms are accessible too.

**Fratelli's Ristorante Italiano** (30 Boltwood Walk, Amherst) – Looking at Fratelli's from the outside, nestled on the lower floor of an old Victorian building in downtown Amherst, you might wonder how such a place could possibly be accessible. No worries! A lovely ramp takes you safely inside, where you'll find a spacious setting with all the accessible amenities. Waitstaff are friendly and knowledgeable: this is one place you need to check out!

**Gerry's Variety** (139 Pleasant Street, Easthampton) – This is it, folks – a real, old-time New England variety store, offering a wonderfully homey, mom-and-pop atmosphere to all who shop there. And we do mean all! There are two accessible parking spaces next to the building near a ramp with protective stripping. A readily accessible, easy-to-open door leads into the store where all customers will find wide aisles and low shelves. **Gerry's** staff members are very accommodating, and like any old-time store, this is a great meeting spot for the whole community.

**Glendale Grill** (65 Glendale Street, Easthampton) – This recently renovated, full-service restaurant offers a fine dining and weekend live entertainment experience for all patrons. The accessible parking next to the well-lit ramp with railings on both sides is clearly marked. The entrance door has a lever-type handle which offers easy access. The spacious dining room offers great maneuverability to all. Bathrooms can be easily accessed, are very spacious and are tactically marked for those requiring those accommodations. The waitstaff are always available to assist upon request. This grill is smokin'.

**Greek Cultural Center** (22 St. George Road, Springfield) – Despite the name, this is a real community center too. Fully accessible, the Center offers classroom spaces for community groups and non-profits: all are welcome to participate in classes and activities. There's also an accessible gym with a basketball court, perfect for wheelchair basketball. But let's not forget the Glendi Festival, where every year St. George Cathedral offers thousands of visitors from far and near the best in traditional Greek foods, pastries, music, dancing, and old-fashioned Greek hospitality.

**Hawks and Reed Performing Arts Center** (289 Main Street, Greenfield) – This performance venue offers two floors of easily accessible space. The bottom floor provides easy entrance and a wide-open area for enjoyment of performances. Even better, the stage is accessible! Nearby bathrooms are fully accessible and offer tactile signage. The elevator brings you to the upper floor where you can enjoy a play or other forms of performance art. Bleachers there offer a cut-out area for wheelchair users. And there's plenty of on-street parking with an adjoining curb cut near the entrance. What a wonderful job the Hawks and Reed folks have done with a grand old building.

**Mill 180 Park** (180 Pleasant Street, Suite 217, Easthampton) – This indoor urban park housed in an old factory building is a wonderful example of creative accessibility. There are outdoor and indoor entrance ramps, as well as an easily accessible private room (the Mushroom!) for individual and family meditation, quiet time, and dining. In the café customers can get a delicious meal from plants and vegetables grown at the Park, with lower counter space available to place your orders. Waitstaff are very helpful and enthusiastic: they should be – this is a great place!

**Mount Tom Universal Access Trail – The Bray Lake Loop** (125 Reservation Road, Holyoke) – Got a fear of the great outdoors? Forget about it and head out to the Universal Access Trail at the Mt Tom Reservation in Holyoke. The Bray Lake Loop provides a unique, wheelchair accessible outdoor recreation experience. Beyond the beauty of nature, the site provides convenient parking, an accessible picnic table and a lovely, meandering trail that provides an elevated vista of Bray Lake. There is also a lakefront viewing pier for up-close bird watching; there's even a place to drop a line to fish!

**Northampton Brewery** (11 Brewster Court, Northampton) – Believe it or not, this is the oldest brew-pub in Massachusetts. It's one of the most successful too, with several expansions and ongoing accessibility improvements to its credit over the years. Recent accessibility enhancements include lifts to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and the elevated roof-top patio and bar area, as well as power door openers inside the restrooms to allow patrons to exit the rooms without a battle. Conveniently located smack dab in the middle of a whole bunch of public parking, this venue offers freshly brewed beers, creative food items and friendly staff. Now go out and celebrate Ocktoberfest!

**Pulaski Park** (240 Main Street, Northampton) – This small park between City Hall and the Academy of Music should be the heart of Northampton, and now – after years of planning and work – it really is. The park has single-grade pathway threading through all its features, including a playground and a stage: every feature is accessible. The renovation also included the construction of a beautiful ramp that winds down against a steep slope to the Roundhouse parking lot, offering wheelchair access to the bikeway

and beyond. For years a gathering spot for friendly encounters as well as the terminus for marches and protests, Pulaski Park is now truly open to the whole City!

***Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst*** (121 North Pleasant Street, Amherst) – This little place of worship and joy in the middle of town underwent some significant changes a few years back, but the place isn't just bigger: it's now truly open to all. There is a ramped entrance to the upper level and elevator access to both levels of the meetinghouse and to the chancel in the sanctuary. There are large print hymnals and Orders of Service available upon request, as well as hearing aids to amplify all worship services and portable microphones to include everyone. The Society also works to address the needs of persons with chemical sensitivity and service animals, and provides accommodations so that children with any kind of disability may participate in the religious education program. The word is over-used, but ... Hallelujah!

***West Springfield Council on Aging – Senior Center*** (128 Park Street, West Springfield) – Believe it or not, there are lots of Senior Centers that are tiny and cramped, and that only meet the bare minimum of accessibility while excluding many elders from full participation. But that's not the case on Park Street in West Springfield. This beautiful facility welcomes everyone by crossing all the t's and dotting all the i's, from power-assisted entry doors (not standard equipment!) to programs and services that reflect the community's diversity of needs and abilities.

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### **Paul Winske Awards, Individuals**

***Vanessa Bernecer*** (Greater Springfield Senior Services) – Vanessa Bernecer is a Geriatric Support Services Coordinator at Greater Springfield Senior Services, Inc....or a GSSI at GSSSI. But forget about that stuff: she does a wonderful job! Anyone can find modern health care systems intimidating and difficult to navigate: some of us can just stop asking questions or sticking up for ourselves. That's where a skilled service coordinator can make the difference between dependence and independence. Our nominator said that Ms. Bernecer "is very friendly and always in the best position to help me with something I need."

***Barbara Black*** (Just retired as Early Childhood Coordinator, Northampton Schools) – First with the old Hampshire Community Action Commission and then with the Northampton Schools, Barbara Black has been an advocate for all children, working to ensure their pathways to education. "Children – especially young children – don't speak up for themselves and say what they need," Ms. Black has said, and she has worked long

hours speaking up for them and, as our nominator wrote, “helping people remember that all children can learn.” Today we’re happy to honor Ms. Black for 45 years of changing lives.

**Walter Goodridge** (Conway) – In these days of “fake news,” maybe it’s not such a good thing to call Walter Goodridge a fabricator, but that’s what our nominator did, writing “he helps people fix things especially wheelchairs and adaptive equipment. He also makes devices from scratch ... he’s a fabricator.” In these days when even the simplest piece of equipment can cost whole bunches of money to replace, Mr. Goodridge works to help persons with disabilities in the most rural county in the state: thank you!

**Vickie Hutchinson** (The Salasin Center, Greenfield) – Vickie Hutchinson is the Resource Specialist at The Women’s Resource Center of the Salasin Center, a place that provides safety and resources to women who are experiencing violence. Our nominator wrote that Ms. Hutchinson has helped hundreds of women and families. “Please recognize her for how much she provides for the community in support, clothing, and everything you need to be whole again. She is an amazing person who helped me through a serious assault.” We’re happy and proud to honor her today!

**Margery Jess** (Western Mass Training Consortium, Holyoke) – Margery Jess is a Family Support Worker...talk about an understatement! For families with children who have emotional or behavioral challenges, isolation is the rule, not the exception. Ms. Jess helps these folks become effective advocates and makes sure they all get through the system in one piece. Our nominator wrote that “she is super-helpful, and has helped me advocate for my son for *seven* years and get my family what it needs.” That’s a lucky seven: thank you!

**Theodore Mason, M.D.** (Springfield) – Dr. Mason is an otolaryngologist, and a darn good one! He is an expert at diagnosing and treating the secondary conditions that often accompany hearing loss in Deaf people, and his surgical skills with cochlear implants have helped many hard of hearing and late Deafened people be independent in the hearing world. Easy to talk to, friendly, and supportive, our nominator spoke for hundreds of others: “he helped me a lot.”

**Erica McNamara** (The Apartments at Ames Privilege, Chicopee) – Finding good, accessible, and affordable places to live for people coming out of nursing homes can be almost impossible. And that’s where Erica McNamara, the property manager at the Apartments at Ames Privilege, comes in. If there’s a vacancy, she makes the whole process smooth and easy. But there’s more! She is always ready to visit folks in nursing homes and help them with all the paperwork that needs to be completed; then she turns around and gets to work on the modifications the new tenant will need to live independently. As our nominator said, “she is amazing.”

**Sandy Ortega** (Brightwood Health Center, Springfield) – Sandy Ortega works for the Commonwealth Care Alliance out of the Brightwood Health Center. Okay, that’s a mouthful, but what you need to know is that she puts her heart into pulling people’s lives back together. We know, because we’ve seen her in action. As our nominator said, “she is dedicated to help her clients with solutions to their situations and problems.”

**Doris Santos** (Brightwood Health Center, Springfield) – Brightwood just keeps churning out the winners. Doris Santos retired not too long ago, but she can’t hide from the Access Awards. She did wonderful work for the North End community in Springfield for many years, and she has used her gifts of humor and empathy to help persons with disabilities move successfully through the modern medical maze. We are going to miss her!

**Bethany Young** (Kehillah Program, Springfield Jewish Community Center) – The Kehillah Program is all over the place...in a good way. For persons with developmental disabilities – children, youths, and adults – there’s music, and fitness, and summer camp and lots of other things. Bethany Young is the Director, and our nominator wrote that “she goes out of her way for every person she meets; works off the clock; sacrifices her time for her programs and the participants in them.” That’s an impressive commitment, and she gets impressive results.

### **Home Sweet Home Hero Award**

**The World War II Club and Jen Rex** (50 Conz Street, Northampton) – For years the Stavros Board of Directors has been meeting at the World War II Club, where Jen Rex has kept them well-supplied with water (despite their pleas for harder stuff) and kept the juke box quiet. This past spring the Club generously provided space for a Stavros trivia night, with proceeds going to our Home Sweet Home ramp-building program. Even better, they threw in the earnings from their regular Trivia Night, helping us as we built 86 ramps in the last 12 months. Hats off to the Deuce and Jen!

### **Friends of Stavros**

**Kirk Joslin** (Formerly President of Easter Seals and always a good guy) – Kirk Joslin was the President of Easter Seals Massachusetts for many years; we’re pretty sure he knows just about everyone with a developmental disability in the state, and he was a good friend of Paul Winske, the man all these awards are named after. Under Kirk’s leadership, Easter Seals has provided vital services around durable medical equipment (the stuff that doesn’t get thrown away after one use – things like wheelchairs), and has helped develop wave after wave of youth leaders for the independent living movement. Even after his retirement he continues to take the time to go all over the state to participate in rallies and activities that further the full integration of persons with

disabilities in the community. Thank you for making such a big difference, and for being such a good friend!

### **Keynote Speaker**

Life Is What You Make of It. If you think those are just words, pay attention to our Keynote Speaker. After a senseless assault on a Boston street where her assailants left her for dead, **Laura Chagnon** woke from a five-week coma as Jane Doe, with no idea who she was. The attack left her with paralysis of all four limbs (quadriplegia) and a Traumatic Brain Injury; she is also legally blind. But you know what? The only thing that slows her down is a lack of access for her wheelchair. She has published two books of poetry, every year she speaks to over 1,000 inmates at various correctional facilities, and every day she works to make life better for everyone else. We're proud to welcome her today!