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## Educating the Consumer Rent Before You Purchase

Written by Nancy Whaley, Pennsylvania Franchise



The decision to purchase a wheelchair accessible vehicle involves a process that requires a great deal of research and forethought. Unlike the average prospective car buyer; a person with a disability is usually unable to test-drive or ride in a vehicle before purchasing. Because of the expense and variety of adaptive equipment, it is advisable to see and try out various options before committing to the purchase of an accessible vehicle.

One way to educate yourself about adaptive equipment available for making a vehicle accessible is to attend one of the national Abilities Expos where vendors from all major companies are available to demonstrate their products. Another way to learn about options for vehicle modification is to rent the various types of vans from Wheelchair Getaways. This will give you an opportunity to determine the type of vehicle that best meets your special needs.

The first type of adaptive vehicle you may want to consider is a full size conversion van. Most of these conversions are done on a Ford, Dodge, or Chevrolet. The full size van can have a raised roof and/or a lowered floor, a raised door entry, and of course, a wheelchair lift. There are several advantages to the full size van. Because of the raised roof, the interior headroom is greater than in smaller vans. An important measurement to consider is the height of the person sitting in the wheelchair or scooter. If the individual is tall, he/she may require the extra inches of headspace that a full size van

allows for safety and comfort purposes. An attendant or driver will appreciate the extra inches of headroom when standing to assist the person in the wheelchair. Another advantage of the full size van is the large, comfortable bench seat that reclines or unfolds into a bed. Some people even go camping in this type of vehicle. The large bench seat comfortably seats three passengers and easily accommodates two child safety seats. There are two disadvantages to having a full size vehicle. Parking in the average garage is not possible because of the raised roof. In inclement weather, having to park outdoors can be difficult for a wheelchair user. The other negative feature of the large van is that most side wheelchair lifts intrude into the interior. This intrusion limits maneuvering space and negates the possible removal of the front co-pilot seat to place the person in the wheelchair in the front passenger location.

Purchasing a converted mini van is another choice for buyers. Many drivers prefer a mini van because it rides and drives more like a car than a truck and the gas mileage is a little better than in a full size van. The mini van has a lowered floor that allows the vehicle to be parked in a garage. Although it varies, the lowered floor van allows approximately 2" less interior headroom than the full size van. Mini vans are usually equipped with an automatic ramp that is an integral part of the vehicle. As the ramp automatically unfolds, the kneeler allows the rear of the vehicle to lower resulting in a very gradual incline to the entry ramp.



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When the ramp automatically folds, it "hugs" the door or is stored under the floor, allowing maximum space in the interior. Because the ramp does not take up much space, the vehicle can easily accommodate two wheelchair users. The front passenger seat has a quick release feature; therefore, one wheelchair can be secured in the passenger position. The major disadvantage of the lowered floor mini van is the limited ground clearance. On snow-covered roads, unpaved country roads, or speed bumps, you may drag



bottom. Many owners like the mini van conversion because it appears more like a vehicle without handicapped adaptations.

Along with the decision of purchasing a mini or full size van, choosing the proper adaptive equipment for entry and driving is also important. A buyer needs to ascertain whether a ramp or a lift would better meet his/her needs. The user needs to decide on rear or side placement of the lift/ramp. This decision is an important one. Rear entry will put you out on the street level and you may have to roll into the traffic to reach a curb cut. Side entry will allow you to exit onto the sidewalk, but can be a problem if someone parks beside your van and

blocks your entry. If the person with the disability is driving, he/she needs to determine the type of adaptations that may be needed. Options include transfer seats, hand controls, steering devices, low effort steering and braking, etc. It is best to have a rehabilitation center recommend a qualified adaptive driving instructor to help in evaluating your special needs and instruct you in the use of the special equipment. You may also want to contact ADED for qualified instructions in your area at 1-800-290-2344.



Renting a wheelchair accessible vehicle before purchasing will help to answer many questions and concerns about which conversion van style is best for you. Taking into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of each, along with identifying your specific needs will help you make an accurate decision. Renting an accessible van prior to purchasing provides a wonderful opportunity for you to become familiar with the many options and will give you confidence that you are making the right choice in purchasing your new wheelchair accessible van. Remember to contact Wheelchair Getaways (800-642-2042) for the location nearest you to rent a van before you buy.

## Wheelchair Getaways Welcomes Northeast Locations

Wheelchair Getaways announces the opening of a new location in Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Scott Sanders is the owner of this new location and will provide service in the Brooklyn area. We are pleased to offer accessible travel services in this area. Welcome Mr. Sanders and Good Luck!

Additional changes have been made to franchises in the Northeast. The New England franchise was recently purchased and changes in ownership have taken place at Wheelchair Getaways of New York State.

Dennis and Susan Kochanek recently purchased the New England franchise location. The business is now located in Somerset, MA, at 11 Grand Army Highway and will serve Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Dennis and Susan have owned and operated Adaptive Mobility Equipment, Inc for nearly a decade. When asked why the Kochanek's decided to expand into the van rental business, Dennis responded, "As a mobility business we could see that there was a need for accessible vehicle rental services and decided to pursue our options to expand and include this service to our customers. After a thorough study of the situation, we decided to become a

part of the best accessible van rental franchise company in America, Wheelchair Getaways. We love constantly meeting new, wonderful people and knowing that our services help to make their lives a little brighter. It makes the business interesting and exciting."

Wheelchair Getaways of New York State also had a change of ownership. James Lyons III and John E. Barchella, Jr. recently purchased the franchise and will operate the business from its new location in Poughkeepsie, New York, providing delivery throughout the state of New York. This franchise will also provide larger commercial vehicles to nursing homes, paratransit, and other companies providing transportation to persons with disabilities.

As a result of a physical disability, Jim has been a wheelchair user and can relate to the challenges facing his customers. He is eager to provide accessible transportation services to wheelchair users in the state of New York. "During my recovery, I did not know about Wheelchair Getaways. Renting a van during that time would have changed my life," Jim said.

Welcome to our new team of professionals!

**New York State: 866-725-1803**

**Brooklyn: 800-807-4801**

**Massachusetts: 800-727-1656**

About the Authors of:

## ***Wheelchairs On the Go: Accessible Fun in Florida***

*Article provided by Michelle Stigleman and is also featured on the website: [www.wheelchairsonthego.com](http://www.wheelchairsonthego.com)*

In 1965, on a high school football field in Richmond, Indiana, Randy Stigleman missed a tackle that altered his life forever.

Lying lifeless, with a broken neck, totally paralyzed, Randy was rushed to a hospital 90 miles away in Indianapolis where he hung between life and death for two weeks. The community rallied behind him with tremendous emotional support and fundraisers to help pay the staggering medical bills. At 17, he was told he would be a quadriplegic for the rest of his life.

Randy never lost his faith or his zest for life. He realized God had a bigger plan and purpose for his life and would give him the strength to overcome the challenges. After college, he married Michelle, his high school sweetheart. They share a passion that life should be lived to its fullest. As a family man, Randy has two wonderful children. Professionally, Randy is a partner in a successful health care company. Socially, Randy is the life of the party. And for fun, he has snow skied, ridden hot air balloons, flown in a glider, whitewater rafted and gone scuba diving. His real love, however, is fishing. In addition to saltwater fishing around his home in Florida, he has traveled out west and in Canada to fly fish many world-class rivers. Randy's strong faith, an optimistic attitude and an outgoing personality have been an inspiration to others. Randy is far from the stereotype of a 'disabled' person.

But don't think that traveling and having fun in a wheelchair is simple. Michelle starts months in advance planning trips, seeking out details that able-bodied travelers can take for granted. How hilly is the trail to the river? Is the trail paved, mulched or natural? Are the riverbanks level? How far down to the water? Can someone help lift him aboard the boat? Is it shady enough that Randy won't overheat? They often stumble across opportunities we never dreamed possible. For instance, one summer in Colorado, they passed a 'Disabled Ski School.' Curious, they stopped in and discovered a premiere ski program for the disabled with specialized equipment, classes and specially trained staff. The Stigleman's only regret was not finding this opportunity years earlier.

When their children left for college Michelle

explored different career paths, now that she no longer needed to be a stay-at-home mom. She felt God calling her to use her experiences to help others. But how? After 18 months of prayer, she woke up one morning with the answer: to take what she has learned from planning family vacations for a wheelchair-bound person and write a guide to help others find the many recreational opportunities available to them.

The book provides the practical details that the physically disabled need. It may open doors and new opportunities for someone struggling with a life changing disability. It also sends a message of encouragement to stretch one's limits and develop an "I can" attitude that will enrich their lives forever.

Thus, the idea of *Wheelchairs on the Go* was born. In 1998 Michelle teamed up with Deborah Van Brunt, who has a communications background and whose family travels frequently with the Stiglemans. They published a small access guide exclusively on Florida's Gulf Coast. Its overwhelming success and tremendous feedback from readers encouraged Stigleman and Van Brunt to publish this Florida-wide guide. After four years of research that incorporated and expanded the information in the first book, the new state-wide *Wheelchairs on the Go* is the definitive guide to Florida for people using canes, walkers and wheelchairs.

*Wheelchairs on the Go* can save you hours of painstaking travel planning and those disastrous disappointments of arriving someplace with unexpected barriers. The authors have created a key to unlock activities and adventures you may have never thought possible for someone with limited mobility. The book provides the practical details that the physically disabled need. It may open doors and new opportunities for someone struggling with a life changing disability. It also sends a message of encouragement to stretch one's limits and develop an "I can attitude" that will enrich their lives forever.

*Wheelchairs on the Go: Accessible Fun in Florida presents readers with information on nearly every aspect of travel in Florida. State areas of focus include: the Panhandle, Northwest Gulf Coast, Tampa Bay, Southwest Gulf Coast, North Central, Orlando, Central, Northeast Atlantic Coast, Everglades National Park, and the Keys. To order your copy of Wheelchairs on the Go Accessible Fun in Florida call 1-888-245-7300 or visit the following website to order online or by mail: [www.wheelchairsonthego.com](http://www.wheelchairsonthego.com).*

***"It may open doors and new opportunities for someone struggling with a life changing disability."***