

# THE Frankfortarian

THE OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE  
**ROTARY CLUB  
 OF FRANKFORT**

1800 Benson Valley Road, Frankfort, KY 40601

The weekly meeting of the Frankfort Rotary Club  
 airs on FPB's 'Cable 10' at 7pm Monday and 9am Tuesday

**ROTARY CLUB OF  
 FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY**

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*Next Week's Meeting...*

There will be no meeting January 1, 2025.



## Happy New Year!

President Gary (below) and Sherrill Smith along with his granddaughter Mary Bell Smith (Grant Smith's daughter, below left) helped Rotary ring the bell and collect money for the Salvation Army.



## No limits with accessible travel

*Long overlooked, travelers with disabilities are finding fewer barriers*

By Elizabeth Hewitt

On the edge of the idyllic coastal city of Yarmouth, Maine, a trail weaves through a dense strip of forest. There are no steep sections, just flat or gentle slopes. Hundreds of feet of boardwalk, with minimal gaps between the flush wooden planks, carry nature lovers over the top of marshy wetlands.

This segment of the West Side Trail, which soon will extend to about 2½ miles, was designed with accessibility in mind,

Continued, over



At the West Side Trail in Yarmouth, Maine, volunteers found that building to accessible standards didn't involve much extra effort — and improved the trail for everyone.

Courtesy of Dan Ostrye

explains trail coordinator Dan Ostrye, a member of the Rotary Club of Yarmouth, a partner in the project. And when Ostrye is out on a 1-mile section that has already been completed, he often runs into people with limited mobility. “It’s so firm; it’s so flat, they don’t have roots to climb over,” he says. “These are all things that are impediments to people with disabilities.”

From hiking trails to airport concourses, travel can be challenging for anyone. For people with disabilities, a lack of accessible design or information can make it even tougher. But efforts are growing to reduce the barriers, from online platforms that make it easier to find suitable accommodations to excursions that meet the specific needs of tourists with disabilities.

“People think of travel as a luxury,” says Maayan Ziv, founder of Access Now, an online platform that shares accessibility information about businesses and attractions. “But I think the power of travel is that it touches so many aspects of life.”

An estimated one-sixth of the world’s population has some form of disability, a diverse group of people with a wide range of experiences and needs, not all of which require infrastructure investments. Hotels are realizing that travelers with autism, for instance, can find new sights and sounds challenging and may appreciate quieter check-in times or other low-sensory experiences.

For years, the travel world was designed largely without consideration for this sizable portion of the population. But in 2018-19, before the pandemic disrupted the travel industry, Americans with disabilities spent an estimated \$58.7 billion on travel. And one of the largest travel segments is made up of older adults, a group for which disabilities are more common. “This industry is realizing the opportunity and starting to make investments,” says Ziv.

### Fear of Flying

Still, gaps remain, and one place where inequities are particularly stark is the airport. For people who use mobility equipment like wheelchairs, flying is “the absolute worst” form of transit, says Peter Tonge, an accessibility consultant and a member of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg-Charleswood, Manitoba.

Boarding a plane requires moving to a special wheelchair and then to the seat. Many planes don’t have accessible bathrooms. And travelers’ equipment is often transported

in the baggage hold, where mishaps are frequent: U.S. airlines damaged, lost, or delayed delivery of 11,527 wheelchairs and scooters in 2023, or about 1.4 out of every 100 pieces of equipment transported, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

A frequent traveler, Tonge has had his manual wheelchair damaged about half the times he’s flown. Twice he needed to replace it entirely, a custom job that takes six months. “As long as airlines see mobility equipment as luggage, it’s never going to get the care and respect that it has to have,” he says.

Tonge is skeptical airlines will change without new laws, though he’s hopeful that grassroots advocacy is raising awareness. He’s playing his part, including on social media, where he posted about his experiences getting around Paris this summer to watch the Paralympics. And he is noticing shifts beyond the airport, including in his own community, as museums and popular cultural destinations take steps to meet the needs of all visitors.

In Winnipeg, Tonge’s consulting company is working with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights to improve accessibility, a rigorous process that involves auditing the physical space, reviewing programs, and training staff.

Winnipeg’s Assiniboine Forest, one of the largest urban forests in Canada, is also becoming easier for people with disabilities to explore. The Winnipeg-Charleswood club is the park’s custodian and is spearheading an effort to improve facilities like washrooms and harden the trail surfaces, similar to the work at the West Side Trail project in Yarmouth, Maine.

Early in the Yarmouth project, a local leader urged trail builders to make the path accessible. As they planned the western side of the 11-mile trail network, they found that building to accessible standards didn’t involve much extra effort - and improved the trail for everyone who uses it. “Everybody thinks, ‘Well, that just makes it accessible for disabled people,’” Ostrye says. “That’s far from the truth. It’s the most sustainable trail that you can build.”

### Aids to access

While many places say they are accessible, Ziv, who uses a wheelchair, has often found that features are lacking to meet people’s specific needs for diverse disabilities. That inspired her to launch [Access Now](#), which includes a map where people share reports about specific accessibility features, such as sensory details like whether a space is quiet or scent-free, descriptions of bathrooms and entries, and whether braille or sign language is used.

What makes a space accessible is different for each person, explains Ziv. “If you provide people with information, they know what works for them.”

The feedback that Access Now users provide is identifying hurdles and leading to improvements, including on more than 60 sections of the 28,000-kilometer (17,000-mile) Trans Canada Trail network. The company is also working with tourism boards, like in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where the city offers mats that enable beachgoing wheelchair users to traverse the sand and loans out big-tire beach wheelchairs.

Travel platforms are also making it easier for people to schedule stays that fit their needs. At every hotel room listed on the platform Wheel the World, for example, someone has used a tape measure to check details like the height of the bed and sink.

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*This story is a collaboration between Rotary magazine and Reasons to be Cheerful, a nonprofit solutions journalism outlet and originally appeared in the December 2024 issue of Rotary magazine. You can read the full story [here](#).*

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**In Paris, Tonge admires the Eiffel Tower while attending the Paralympics.** *Image credit: Daria Jorquera Palmer*

