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Product Launched at Lucky Platter Inclusion Solutions Creates ADA-Accessible Entries

The high cost of making small businesses accessible to persons with walkers or wheelchairs is often matched by the frustration of a person unable to enter the store, restaurant or building.

Several years ago Evanston resident Patrick Hughes, then executive director of Natural Ties, was having lunch with his friend Sandra Goldin. Mr. Hughes asked Ms. Goldin, who is wheelchair-bound, where in Evanston she would like to go that she was unable at that time to enter. "She named about 20 places where she'd like to go but which were not handicap-accessible," he said.

One might say the dessert for that lunch came at Lucky Platter, 514 Main St., on Nov. 12, when Mr. Hughes company, Inclusion Solutions, launched its product for affordable accessibility, designed particularly for small businesses.

The product is a kit consisting of an outside wireless doorbell, to notify the manager or staff that a customer awaits, and a portable ramp to accommodate a wheelchair.

Hollister Bundy, general counsel for Inclusion Solutions, said that the Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990, was intended to make businesses accessible to the disabled. "It required that business make changes but it was not intended to bankrupt small businesses," he said. Many large companies are able to make their businesses accessible, he said, "but the real problem is small businesses for which a retrofit of \$30,000 was not feasible." The standard, he said, is what is readily achievable, and the people at Inclusion Solutions believe their bell-and-ramp kits will accommodate not only the needs of the disabled but also the purses of small businesses.

"It's the first solution that's been packaged together, to address the problems of small business," said Michael Moran, CFO and director of operations. The package includes the notification bell, tools to install it, the ramp and an assessment of the business, which includes measuring the height or depth to be covered by the ramp and the amount of sidewalk space available outside the business.

"It's practical; it's dignified; it's simple," said Mr. Hughes.

Launching the product at Lucky Platter was an obvious choice for Mr. Hughes. "About seven years ago I asked [owner] Eric [Singer] to make the place more accessible." Doing so, he said, would have cost \$40,000 and would have entailed shutting the restaurant down for two weeks, so that project was not feasible.

However, he said, Evanston resident Mary Friedl, who also is disabled, told him that if Mr. Singer had a portable ramp and a communication device, "I could live with that."

Kerri McLaughlin, marketing director of Inclusion Solutions, said the company is hoping to get a lot of small businesses behind the kits. "They are easy to implement, easy to install and cost effective," she said. "We'd like to see the big bell , which is oversized and can be hit by a fist, a cane or even a person's head if necessary , become a nationally recognized symbol in the business community."

A business itself, Inclusion Solutions emphasizes that there are economic advantages to their kits. "It's not a costly retro fit, and no attorneys are involved." She added, "Businesses don't always think about how being ADA compliant can add to the customer base."

Ms. McLaughlin pointed to Hecky's Barbecue, Inc., 1902 Greenbay Rd., owned by Evanston resident Hecky Powell. "Last summer Hecky added an accessibility bell , not the same bell we are marketing now, but a pilot, some signage and a ramp. Not only is he in ADA compliance, he has added eight new regular customers," she said. At the product launching, which Ms. Goldin was unable to attend, Mr. Hughes said, "This place in particular is where she wanted to come through the front door."