

Promoting Opportunities for People with Disabilities to Play Golf

Understanding the ADA is just the beginning.

BY CAROL WYNNE

An article on single-rider golf cars in the May/June 2007 issue of the *USGA Green Section Record* needs clarification. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifies that public access golf courses cannot discriminate against golfers with disabilities. Contrary to the article's claim, single-rider golf cars are not specifically identified in the ADA as being required, nor does the ADA currently require any other specific type of device or equipment.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is currently drafting a notice of proposed rule-making on this matter. The process will involve a public comment period spanning several months. Sometime after the comment period is closed, the DOJ will prepare and issue final regulations on whether single-rider golf cars or other mobility devices are required, and who is responsible for their provision. This rule-making process will be lengthy, and final regulations are not imminent.

The debate and misinformation about single-rider golf cars has unfortunately gotten in the way of the more important issue of implementation and consistent use of best practices for serving individuals with disabilities.

Golf course owners should find appropriate ways to accommodate all golfers, including those with disabilities. There is no single solution and golf course owners should work with golfers to provide a positive experience. This includes modification of policies and

practices to ensure people with disabilities avoid discrimination. This may mean modifying cart path and golf car policies so golfers with disabilities have full access to the course; it may mean installing a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) and training staff to operate it; using automated practice range teeing devices that do not require bending over to tee up; or adapting a few standard golf cars to make them easier for use by those with disabilities — removing an armrest, adding a grab bar or adding hand controls.

For individuals who cannot walk or stand and must play from a seated position, single-rider golf cars may be a solution. Another solution may be to modify seats on standard golf cars so they swivel. Simply purchasing a single-rider car does not ensure appropriate accommodation is being provided.

Facilities need to know there is an untapped market of potential players with varying degrees of disability who want to play golf. According to a study conducted by the National Center on Accessibility (NCA) in cooperation with Clemson University, 10% of persons with some disability now play golf. However, 35% of individuals with disabilities not currently playing golf are interested in learning. A welcoming environment and knowledgeable staff are critical in attracting people with disabilities to the game.

According to NCA executive director Gary Robb, "Course owners

should see significant growth in the number of golfers with disabilities, and thus profits, if they offer opportunities to learn the game through a staff trained to teach golfers with disabilities."

The National Alliance for Accessible Golf (www.accessgolf.org) offers information and resources for golfers, instructors, owners, and operators. A major initiative of the Alliance is GAIN™ (Golf: Accessible and Inclusive Networks), an instructional program that establishes community-based inclusive networks between individuals with disabilities, golf professionals, golf course operators, parks and recreation departments, therapeutic recreation and rehabilitation specialists, and advocacy organizations. Through GAIN™ and other programs, the Alliance advances its mission of ensuring individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to engage in the game of golf.

Just like with all the other golfers you serve, one size does not fit all with golfers with disabilities. There is no "magic bullet" to helping people with disabilities enjoy the game of golf. It takes a solid commitment to implementing best practices, and a dedication to serving those who need accommodation, education, instruction, and the opportunity to play.

CAROL WYNNE is executive director of the National Alliance for Accessible Golf.



Specially equipped single-rider golf carts can be adjusted to give those with a wide range of disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the game of golf.

Who supports the National Alliance for Accessible Golf?

- American Therapeutic Recreation Association
- Club Managers Association of America
- Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
- Ladies Professional Golf Association
- National Center on Accessibility
- National Golf Course Owners Association
- National Recreation and Park Association
- Professional Golfers Association of America
- Professional Golfers Association Tour
- United States Golf Association
- ... and others working to ensure the opportunity for all individuals with disabilities to engage in the game of golf

Additional Resources:

- www.accessgolf.org
- www.resourcecenter.usga.org
- www.ncaonline.org
- www.playgolfamerica.org