

September 9, 2009

Dr. Peter Raven, Director
Missouri Botanical Garden
4344 Shaw Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63110

Dear Dr. Raven,

My husband, my sister, our daughter and her two sons and I attended the Japanese Festival on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, in between the showers. It was such a colorful event, with kimono-clad children and adults, and local St. Louisans in an array of apparel. As usual, the plantings everywhere were spectacular; the vegetables in the Kemper Garden were inspiring. We look forward to attending the Best of Missouri in a few weeks.

We have been Garden Members for about 30 years, while living in St. Louis, and then in southern Osage County on a farm, and now in the city of Mexico, Missouri. We try to come in for the special events, and just to see the flowers when we have a chance. I use a scooter to tour the Garden, as I had polio many years ago, and am now using wheels whenever walking distances is an issue. I would like to call your attention to an issue of accessibility in the bathrooms in the Ridgeway Center. While there is one stall for women (haven't toured the men's room), it is not truly accessible, particularly for a woman using a wheelchair. While the wheelchair might squeeze by the toilet in the stall, there would be no way for an individual to exit the chair to use the toilet. Also, the small turn lock is most difficult to use, as it does not pull the door closed for locking.

As an occupational therapist for 35 years, I am particularly conscious of sites that are not truly accessible. I have noticed that the same situation has been in other bathrooms, and remedied without too much difficulty and expense. The stall next to the accessible stall has had the toilet removed and capped, and a new wide doorway installed. And, then there is room for the wheelchair, or the mother who needs to change her baby, and must now squeeze into the stall to have the changing shelf in front of her. A simple door handle for holding while locking the door, or one of the wide paddle openers that provides holding space on it, would solve the door closing concern.

The best way to understand this situation is to have a staff member, in a wheelchair, try to get into the accessible stall, lock the door, and transfer to the toilet. Then, try the men's bathroom using the wheelchair in the stall. Judging by the number of individuals in wheelchairs, scooters and walkers or canes we saw this weekend, the Garden is a venue the community of people with disabilities know they can enjoy. I wonder how many were not able to use the bathroom facilities for the above cited problems.

I trust your staff can provide the information needed to solve this accessibility concern. Post-Polio Health International, with executive offices in St. Louis, has

encouraged polio survivors in our country to advocate for accessibility in our communities as an effort to help others to know “we are still here”. I hope the Missouri Botanical Garden will become truly accessible for all citizens of St. Louis, and the out-of-towners who come to share our treasures.

Sincerely,

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