

“Pro-Access” Designs Win Accessibility Awards



Tranquility Place Housing Co-op was recognized for its residential design. The City of Winnipeg’s Accessibility Awards are given to designs, which make life equitable, comfortable and safe for everyone, including people with disabilities.

A housing co-op, a health agency and a hotel have received awards for their designs, which accommodate people with disabilities. The Tranquility Place Housing Co-op, CancerCare Manitoba and the Best Western Victoria Inn were the recipients of the city’s second annual Accessibility Awards on September 9, 2003.

The Winnipeg Accessibility Award recognizes businesses, organizations and government projects that are incorporating Universal Design concepts into their facilities, services and communications. At the award ceremony, Mayor Glen Murray described Universal Design as a concept, or a way of thinking about design. He said the key is that the design focuses on a range of needs, not averages and referred to the award winners as leaders in their field.

In her introductory remarks Councillor Gerbasi said, “It doesn’t cost more to build it right the first time and to consider designing things for all of our citizens. In fact, it’s good business and good public policy.”

She admitted however, that the City of Winnipeg can’t do it alone and needs business and non-government organizations to join the effort in making the city accessible to everyone.

Tranquility Place Housing Co-op, by design professional Lanny Silver Architect, won the award in the

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The Rights Connection By Janet Baldwin - Chairperson Discrimination and Gender Identity

For most people, gender identity, or one’s sense of being male or female, is in agreement with their sex at birth. For persons who are transgendered, however, gender identity is opposed to sex at birth. For a male-to-female transexual, for example, a person whose birth sex is male will have an innate sense of being female. For persons who are intersexed, being born with parts of both male and female anatomy complicates gender identification. There are also persons who do not identify themselves as being either exclusively male or exclusively female.

Many persons who are transgendered face discrimination and harassment in their daily lives. For example, persons who are going through gender reassignment, requiring that they live in the sex they are transitioning to, often encounter discrimination when they use public washrooms. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission believes that specifically protecting persons from discrimination on the basis of gender identity is important to clarifying that such discrimination is contrary to The Human Rights Code.

“Gender-determined characteristics” is currently a protected ground in The Human Rights Code. While we do accept human rights complaints based on gender identity under “gender-determined characteristics”, this ground, which dates back to 1987, is not adequate to clearly inform potential complainants, respondents and the public-at-large that unreasonable discrimination on the basis of gender identity is prohibited. For that reason, the Commission has recommended that the Government of Manitoba amend our legislation to add “gender-identity” as a protected characteristic.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission hopes that its legislative amendment proposal will go forward at the next sitting of the legislature. Let’s make it clear that discriminating against someone in employment, housing, education or other services because of their gender identity is a contravention of our human rights protections.

Settlements

Condominium Corporation Agrees to Install Strobe Light Fire Alarm

An owner of a condominium unit, who is deaf in one ear and has severely limited hearing in the other, requested that the condominium corporation attach, at its expense, a strobe light feature to the fire alarm in his unit. When it refused, he filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. He believed that its lack of action constituted a failure to reasonably accommodate his special needs based on a disability.

Besides believing that the installation of a strobe light was the individual unit owner's responsibility, the condominium board said that it already had several measures in place to assist people in case of an emergency. For example the site superintendent had a key to the complainant's unit and was instructed to assist him during an emergency. As well, the names of people who needed assistance was posted in the fire panel at the front door for the fire department to see on their arrival. Furthermore, the board questioned the effectiveness of the strobe light feature when the complainant was asleep. There was expert and other evidence however, which confirmed that visual signals such as strobe lights are effective and will wake people up.

Both sides were adamant and eventually a hearing was convened. Before the hearing concluded, however, the parties reached an agreement.

A strobe light in the complainant's bedroom was linked into the central alarm system at the respondent's expense. In addition, the respondent installed another strobe alarm in a different area of the unit so that the complainant would be alerted to any activation of the fire alarm from every vantage point in the unit. These visual alarms are to be considered part of the central fire alarm system, and will remain the property of the respondent.

Buildings with visual alarm systems, as well as audio alarms, could prove to be of great importance to people with hearing disabilities.

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Residential Project category. Features in this housing co-op include level access to entrances in all seasons, wide sidewalks to allow for passing wheelchairs and front doors that are wired for auto door openers and intercoms. There are more features inside such as lower counters and reachable cupboards, side opening oven units and bathtubs with seats.

In the Government Project category the award went to CancerCare Manitoba and design professionals Smith Carter Architects and Engineers. Their design features include tactile and colour contrasting to assist people in finding their way, a level access drop off area with touch free infrared sliding door controls, multi level reception counters which assist people at various heights, whether seated or standing.

In the Business Category, Best Western - Victoria Inn by design professionals Number Ten Architectural Group was the award winner. This hotel, previously known as the International Inn on Wellington, was renovated and upgraded with Universal Design concepts. For example, the main entrance has a wide ramp leading to an accessible entrance and has incorporated visual alarm systems for people with a hearing loss. As well, the main floor washrooms have a sweeping doorless entry, which means anyone carrying luggage or driving a scooter can access the area easily.

The organizing and selection committee was led by the Access Advisory Committee of the City of Winnipeg in cooperation with the Canadian Paraplegic Association, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, SMD Abitech Inc., Planning Property and Quality Employment Services and the Independent Living Resource Centre. The Winnipeg Free Press was a sponsor for the event.

2003-2004 Schedule of Human Rights Workshops is now available.
Call 945-3007 or visit our website
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/hrc/english/education.html>

Translation Project Underway

Information about Manitoba Human Rights will soon be available in Spanish and Cree. The translation project took place over the summer.

The two page, general document is designed to introduce Manitobans, whose first language is not English or French, to the basic concepts of our Human Rights Code. The document includes such topics as discrimination, harassment, and differential treatment. It will be available at the Commission offices as well as on its website.

According to Executive Director Dianna Scarth, the project was spearheaded by a recognition that some Manitobans do not have access to information about their human rights in Manitoba.

"Often," she says, "these are the people most vulnerable to discrimination."

Plans are underway to add Tagalog (Filipino) and German to this translation project. The Commission hopes that eventually the information will be available in other languages such as Punjabi, Portuguese, Polish and Vietnamese.

New Workshop Added to 2003 Youth Conference

Once again, students from across the province have been invited to attend the Human Rights Commission's annual youth awareness conference.

This year a new workshop called Momma Mia will be offered. This Workshop will help students understand the rights of pregnant teenagers and teen moms. Topics include rights, obligations and responsibilities in school, jobs and housing.

Three other workshops are available to the students. They are Taking Care of Business (rights in the workplace), Diversity without Division (harassment and bullying) and Not So Trivial Pursuit (human rights quiz).

Last year, a number of organizations, unions and businesses generously contributed to the conference in a variety of ways, including donation of door prizes and financial contributions towards the general conference expenses. Should you or your organization wish to be a sponsor, please call Patricia Knipe at 945-5112.