

Handicapped on campus: Behrend

Questions have been raised as to Behrend's accessibility for handicapped persons

There have been some question as to whether or not Penn State-Behrend is accessible to people with disabilities. Much of the debate has been stirred by John Emerson, a non-traditional computer programming student who is confined to a wheelchair because he is quadriplegic.

"Behrend is a great college with great faculty and staff," Emerson said. "But the system simply does not care. They think this is a joke and it's not."

Emerson stressed that a major problem on campus is the lack of electronic doors on the bathrooms. He also referred to nearly everything from the sidewalks on campus to some of the heights of bathroom toilets because they do not meeting ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations.

ADA, established in 1990, is the controlling force behind the war to end discrimination by institutions towards Americans with disabilities.

ADA also sets the standards to which institutions must conform to.

Emerson said that the sidewalks are a major obstacle he has to overcome.

"They're in horrible condition and that is due to the weather conditions; they're getting worse. I broke a fork on my wheelchair."

The stairs to the residence halls from the Reed Building pose a problem for some handicapped students. Because people in wheelchairs cannot get the apartments by the stairs, residents are picked up in Reed lobby via the county lift program.

Not only do the sidewalks pose problems, but, according to Emerson, the maintenance of them frustrates him as well.

"The sidewalks are too steep and they don't keep them plowed," he continued.

problem does not go unnoticed.

"We have concerns with walking. As soon as the weather breaks, we are going to do some work to address the problem areas," he said.

Another problem that Emerson cited was the routine of being

"Behrend is a great college with great faculty and staff. But the system simply does not work.

They think this is a joke, and it's not."

- John Emerson

John Ream, Director of Operations at Behrend said that the

"As soon as the weather breaks, we are going to do some work to address the problem areas."

**- John Ream
Director of Operations**

picked up by the county lift every morning and returning to his apartment in the evening.

The county lift is separate from Penn State-Behrend and has to adhere to a set schedule.

Emerson's main problem with the program is the schedule. He must wait in the Reed lobby to be taken to his apartment.

"Paralyzed people don't have the same body temperature and I have to sit inside of the cold Reed Building waiting for the county lift. The building is all glass; I'm half-freezing to death. One of these days I'm going to die in that stupid building. They need to get a warmer place to pick me up," Emerson said.

Ngozi Mboto, the Minority Student and Special Programs Counselor, said that Behrend tries to help and works on solving problems quickly.



Glenhill Farmhouse is the originally built house and is not accessible for wheelchairs. Because of this, often meetings are held in the Reed Building and workers physically go to the person and meet them.

"Every time that someone mentions a problem, we send someone out - usually that same day."

"It's not that things aren't being done," Mboto added. "Because when things are broke they are fixed. Behrend does not have the man power to check the doors all the time, but when they (maintenance) find out about the problem, it is taken care of."

Mboto continued, "I agree there are some problems, like Reed doesn't have an elevator, but that's

a quarter of a million dollars. We can't just go get it. You have to go through the bureaucracy and it takes a long time. You can't blame the person, you can blame the system. At Behrend, there is reasonable accommodation.

According to Mboto, the school is not aware of the accessibility issues. She said that they often have to go to the person instead of the person come to them.

"We are aware of the problem with the Glenhill Farmhouse, for example. It was originally built as a house and not a house at that, it is not accessible for people in wheelchairs."



By the push of a button, most doors on campus opened electronically. These doors in the Reed Building open and close hundreds of times a day. (Right) Sidewalks on campus are uneven and often make it difficult for students to get around.