



Search:

The Florida Bar News

[Advertising Rates](#) • [Classifieds](#) • [Attorneys Exchange](#) • [Archives](#) • [Subscribe](#) • [Journal News HOME](#)

May 15, 2007

## Disabled lawyers want to be full players in the legal profession

By Jan Pudlow  
*Senior Editor*

"What we need is to have a seat at every table, rather than all the seats at one table."

Those words spoken by Ed Lopacki, a Bradenton sole practitioner who uses a wheelchair because he has multiple sclerosis, have become the mantra of the Disability Independence Group, Inc.

Lawyers with disabilities don't want to feel segregated in their own little world, but want to be full players in the legal profession.

Working with more 100 Florida attorneys with disabilities, DIG's mission is to identify and remove barriers so they can practice law to their fullest potential and more fully participate in Bar activities.

As the private nonprofit group embarks on its third year, with support from The Florida Bar Foundation's Improvements in the Administration of Justice Grant Program, it has completed its 2006 Project Report "The Disability-Diversity Initiative, a Statewide Project of Florida Lawyers with Disabilities" and Florida's first Survey on Lawyers with Disabilities (see story, page 6).

When the effort began, DIG Project Consultant Danielle Strickman said they knew about 10 lawyers with disabilities. Currently, she said, there are about 125 she communicates with regularly, who have accomplished a lot:

- Raising awareness about persons with disabilities.
- Surveying inaccessible courthouses (see sidebar, page 7).
- Working with the Equal Opportunities Law Section on a rules change for accommodations in courthouses (see April 1 Bar News).
- Putting on an accessible CLE at last year's Bar Annual Convention (see August 1, 2006, Bar News).
- Participating in the Bar's Fourth Annual Diversity Symposium with a panel discussion: "Overcoming Obstacles: Lawyers with Disabilities" (see April 30 News).

"We are most proud of engaging more than 100 lawyers with disabilities in our work. And we are most proud of the visibility that our work has been given by The Florida Bar," Strickman said, adding that 26 committee members held 32 teleconference meetings during the 2006 project year and 48 conference calls the year before.

There were "two equal greatest achievements," said Matthew Dietz, a Miami civil rights lawyer, president of the DIG board, and a member of the Florida Supreme Court Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity.

"Through the focus groups and the survey, we were able to make The Florida Bar more aware of the importance of including its members who have disabilities and the needs of these members," Dietz said.

"In addition, we encouraged attorneys with disabilities to become more involved in The Florida Bar, thereby making the Bar more aware of the importance of including its members who have disabilities and the needs of these members. Hopefully, this cycle will continue."

An important goal that remains to be accomplished, Dietz said, is "to ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the definition of 'minority' and 'diversity.'

"Accordingly, people with disabilities will not obtain equality in society or within our profession until there is adequate representation throughout our profession. When there is adequate representation, then most will realize that a disability, in most circumstances, is not a barrier to the practice of law, to other professions, or to any aspect in our community."

*For more information about DIG or to get a copy of the 2006 Progress Report, contact Danielle Strickman via e-mail at [ddsdig@bellsouth.net](mailto:ddsdig@bellsouth.net) or call her at (305) 267-3488.*

[News HOME](#)

[Updated: 04-04-2008]

---

© 2005 The Florida Bar