

# WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

## Cinda Hughes, a Person of Ability

Advocate for people with disabilities—public speaker and organizer of events—Native American woman—spiritual person—person with disabilities. I read over this bio and other information about Cinda Hughes, and I say—wow. I know that Cinda Hughes has been on our Advisory Board at the Office of Handicapped Concerns, but I didn't know the personal honors and expertise in the field of disability which Cinda brings to the table.

You might be surprised too. Honors include Keynote Speaker at the second National Conference on Women put on by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in Los Angeles (June, 1999), Keynote Speaker at the Oklahoma Indian Methodist Youth Conference at the Fountainhead Lodge (October, 2000), and Workshop Presenter at the Wellness & Native Disability Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico (July, 2002). Cinda Hughes sits on the Board of Directors of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma. As we mentioned before, Cinda is also on the Advisory Board of our own Office of Handi-

capped Concerns. In 2000 she was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. I could go on.

So why focus on Cinda Hughes now? Let me tell you why. Cinda was crowned Ms. Wheelchair America in Des Moines, Iowa just this past July. "I was very grateful and very surprised and overwhelmed by the confidence people had in me. (Ms. Wheelchair America) has the responsibility and opportunity to reinforce inner beauty and the spiritual gifts women with disabilities possess—grace, tenacity, perseverance and empathy." (These were quotes from Cinda Hughes taken from Joy Morris's article in the Daily Oklahoman July 31 of this year.)

Cinda Hughes has a physical disability and has used a wheelchair since birth. She was taught by her late grandparents, Charles and Alice Toyobo, that she is a person first who happens to have a disability. They instilled confidence in her early on

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**All of us are born with our own special abilities. None of us are alike. There are things which only you can do.**

## Help America Vote Act (Hava)

Did you know that many Americans consider people with disabilities as having the lowest voter participation of any identifiable group in this country?

If that is true, why don't we vote?

That question can be answered a number of ways. Some people would say we have never really been enfranchised and empowered as citizens. Some people would say we have been looked upon as less than and incapable of making decisions on how our government is run. Some people would say that polling places have been inaccessible to people with disabilities. Congress has said in the Help America Vote Act (Hava) that we need to get a standardized procedure in place among all states and among all counties within the states to ensure that Americans can exercise their sacred right and responsibility to become involved in the issues which affect us all.

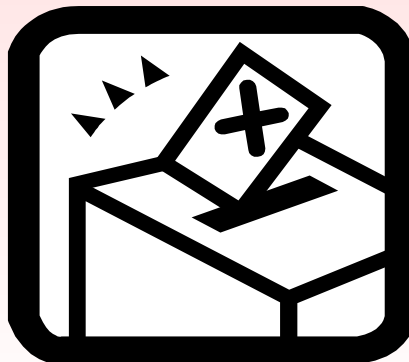
I'm with Michael Clingman this morning at the Oklahoma State Election Board in the basement of our State Capitol. Michael is the State Election Board Secretary who oversees federal, state, and local elections across Oklahoma. "Michael, can you give me some background information about elections and voting in Oklahoma?"

(Michael Clingman)

"Oklahoma is unusual among the states in that we already have in place a statewide election system with uniformity of technology and procedure which most other states do not have. Witness the national election meltdown in the south Florida ballot counting which happened in our last presidential race. Different counties ran the election in different ways in Florida, and the errors of continuing to do

things that way became apparent after that election."

**Did you know that many Americans consider people with disabilities as having the lowest voter participation of any identifiable group in this country?**



"Exactly what is the Help America Vote Act?"

"Hava is Congress's effort to establish a uniform way to vote nationwide."

"How is Congress going to do this?"

"Hava instructs states after 2007 to purchase only accessible election systems with money provided by Hava. It says that by 2006 there will be at least one accessible voting machine in every single polling place across the country. Hava also provides that all voters who register by mail will be asked to furnish identification such as a driver's license, a voter card, or a valid utility bill in the first election they vote."

"What do you mean by accessible voting machine?"

"One accessible voting machine approved by the feds is the DRE (direct recording electronic device). Basically this is a touch screen electronic system which would allow people who are blind to vote in total privacy for the first time ever. The system permits them to vote without the assistance of another person. It could also be used by people whose first language is not English to translate the ballot into their first language. As an interesting note, in some counties in Oklahoma we translated the ballot into Cherokee as late as the early 1980's."

"Could a DRE voting machine be used by a person

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## Help America Vote Act (HAVA) (continued)

who did not have a disability as well?"

"Of course."

"Would the DRE's replace existing voting machines?"

"In Oklahoma I don't think so. We will probably continue to have voting machines which count a paper ballot which you mark yourself along with a ballot which you select electronically on a screen. You will have a choice of which system you want to use."

"I have heard that there could be some problems with verifying the count on the electronic machines."

"Some people worry about mechanical failure or computer hackers who might attempt to falsify the vote registered in the DRE. Traditionally we have relied on that hard copy paper ballot to verify the count in an election which is contested. With the new voting machine you do not have a hard copy ballot. Of course the DRE would have an audit capability, but that audit would only be as good as the information entered."

"Michael, physical access to the polling place continues to be a problem for many people with disabilities in Oklahoma. What can I do if I want to vote, and I can't get into the building?"

"My first suggestion would be that you consider early voting at the County Election Board in the county where you live. Elections are always on a Tuesday, but you can vote early on a Friday, a Monday, and sometimes a Saturday. Early voting does not occur in your regular precinct. To vote early, go to your local county election board. By voting early, you avoid crowds and have more time if you are a person with disabilities."

"Are there other accommodations I might use to vote?"

**Just when I was getting used to yesterday, along came today!**



"You may request personal assistance to come out to your car with a ballot. This needs to be requested in advance. Of course, you may vote absentee and mail in your ballot. You may also request to vote in a different precinct which has the same ballot used in your precinct if you find your polling place inaccessible."

"Are all polling places in Oklahoma accessible?"

"In the latest survey, local election boards are saying that 91% of polling places in Oklahoma are accessible."

"What do I do if my place to vote is not accessible?"

"Report this to your County Election Board, or you may report this to the State Election Board (405-521-2391)."

"Can I report this on a higher level?"

"The U.S. Department of Justice enforces the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), and you can make a written complaint there requesting an investigation."

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## ACCESSIBLE HOUSING IN PURCELL

I am interested in accessibility, especially in the area of housing for people who are elderly and disabled. People call our office all the time who may have recently acquired a disability and find that there are obstacles all over their home. One of the most frequent requests for information we have is about how to get a ramp built so that a person in a wheelchair can get in and out of their house. After this, we frequently hear complaints about narrow doorways. And then, don't forget those inaccessible bathrooms. The world looks so different from a chair. Many times we don't realize the issues until it happens to us.

I have just been in touch with a woman in Purcell, Oklahoma who walks without assistance but seems to have an understanding of accessibility

and the importance it has for people who use a wheelchair. She shares with me a dream she has to bring accessible housing to people in her city. She has gone so far as to clear the lot next to her home and prepare a foundation for a duplex which is totally accessible. The duplex is being manufactured off site according to specifications. She will rent her units to people with disabilities. What features have been built into this duplex? Let's take a look.

First, the entrances to each unit are on ground level. There are no steps to negotiate. Entrances are a full 36 inches wide for easy entry. The interior of each apartment is simple with a front door opening to living space separated from a kitchen/dining room space by a desk-level elbow of a cabinet which can be used as a bar to eat from or as a desk for a computer or other office equipment. A bedroom is to

the right off of the living room. Behind the bedroom is a totally-accessible bathroom. The simple floor plan has the living room and the bedroom in the front of the apartment and the kitchen/dining room and the bathroom to the back. Both units of the duplex are identical.



**Accessible housing is good for all people—not just people with disabilities.**

Bathrooms are many times a problem area for accessibility. To begin with, this bathroom has ample space to turn a chair around in or permit an attendant in the room also—a full 10'X12'. There is a roll-in shower which eliminates the side of that bathtub which is often an obstacle for the person in a chair. The shower has a fold-down bath seat and a hand-held shower head with multiple grab bars for maximum safety and convenience. Grab bars are near the toilet as well for

safety sake, and the sink is wall mounted so a person could roll underneath. The floor has a no-skid surface to reduce falls. The washer and dryer are located in the large bathroom space close to a clothes closet so a person does not have to walk a long distance to hang up their clean clothes. The windowless bathroom is lighted with a solar tube which can also serve as a night light on nights when the moon is out. Of course, the bathroom has electric lighting as well.

The bedroom has three windows to provide lots of light. Multiple electric outlets are also wired for cable TV and phone jacks so there would be multiple options of how a person could arrange their bedroom without having to resort to long extension cords which can be tripped over. The bedroom is

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## ACCESSIBLE HOUSING IN PURCELL (continued)

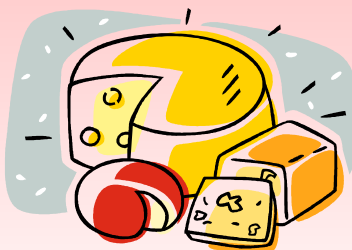
large enough to accommodate either a single or a double bed.

The kitchen has a simple, steel sink. Lower cabinets have pull-out shelves, and a corner cabinet has a lazy susan turning shelf for convenience in getting things off the shelf. There are plenty of electrical outlets for kitchen appliances. The kitchen has a four-burner, gas stove. As we mentioned earlier, there is an extended cabinet surface at waist level dividing the kitchen from the living room where an individual could eat or use for a computer or work surface. There is a 36" wide side door exiting to the outside on ground level from the kitchen/dining room area.

The living room is a full 12'X12' with a front door and two windows. As in the bedroom, there are cable television, phone jacks, and electrical outlets at several locations to minimize the need for extension cords across the room. Safety is always a priority.

Each of the duplex units will be 528 square feet. Each will be heated by a wall-mounted heater between the living room and the dining room/kitchen areas. Each will be cooled by a window air conditioner. There will be an asphalt driveway around the back of both duplex units, and mail can be delivered through a vertical slot near the side outside door. Public transportation with a lift is available in Purcell with 24 hour advance notice.

This duplex is being built off-site according to specifications by the owner as we mentioned earlier. It is not a mobile home. It is a pre-manufactured, modular home. The owner of this property has spent a lot of time and effort to produce a floor plan which is friendly to people with disabilities. I am thinking that what is being done in Purcell, Oklahoma can be done in other communities. Accessible housing is good for all people—not just people with disabilities.



**Age is important only if you're a cheese.**

## Help America Vote Act (Hava) (continued)

In the October, 2000 issue of Will's Corner, Oklahoma we talked with you about voting in Oklahoma. Remember, to vote in a particular election, you must be registered at least 24 days before the day of the election. If you choose to vote absentee, you may contact your local County Election Board to request an application. Even people who reside in nursing homes can vote absentee in an election. Their ballots

will be delivered to them. Ask for what you need. If you have a specific disability which makes it difficult for you to vote, share this with you County Election Board or your State Election Board. Oklahoma will be receiving \$44 million from the U.S. Congress to allow our state to implement the provisions of the Help America Vote Act.

## WOMAN WITH A WILL

“When you grow up being told you can’t do things because of your disability, you get an attitude that you’re going to do it no matter what.” So says Kahla Stands-Reser of Alva, Oklahoma in a recent call to the Office of Handicapped Concerns. Kahla entered this world over four decades ago with a condition called congenital adrenal hyperplasia which basically means that her adrenal glands were not working properly. In spite of her disability, she began working with horses at age six against her mother’s wishes and has built a life around these wonderful animals which can be so much benefit to people with disabilities. Kahla has trained horses, shown horses, been a professional jockey, taught children to ride, and been involved in equine therapy for people with disabilities for a lifetime. She says that riding a horse can stimulate muscles for a person that a physical therapist could never touch. The sense of power while riding the animal. The agile step forward. The exhilaration of it all. That’s how she has learned to believe in the power of the horse to strengthen the person with disabilities—a physical strength and a mental confidence which can be therapy to anyone whether they be able-bodied or not.

“Kahla, I know horses have contributed so much to your life. But I understand your work with them may have also contributed to the problem with your left knee which you are experiencing now.”

“I was a professional jockey for a period in my life. I raced horses and repeatedly injured my knee in the starting cages. You’re waiting impatiently in the line up, and your knees can hit the steel gates in that power-surge at the beginning of the race which is like a

cannon being shot down the track. I think that’s how I injured my knee and how I have ended up in the wheelchair I am in today.”

“You are needing surgery?”

“My doctor’s been talking surgery for some time now, and it looks like we’re going to be scheduling something pretty soon. I have a torn tendon and ligaments and nerve damage in my left knee.”

“Are you going to walk again?”

“I’m a very determined person. Yes, I’m going to walk again, and I’m going to do more than that. I’m going to ride a horse again. I love to ride bare-back and feel the power of that horse underneath me.”

“Kahla, I know you also have hopes to return to work. What do you want to do?”

“I want to work with people with disabilities. I know that access to public places is so much of an issue for people who are in wheelchairs. I would like to go to restaurants and all kinds of public

places to show owners and managers what they could do to make their buildings more accessible to people with disabilities.”

“Goodness knows there’s plenty of work that needs to be done in that arena. Access is still a major issue for people with disabilities. Did your disabilities cause you to want to help other people with disabilities?”

“Being in a wheelchair these past few months has really brought home to me

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**...a physical strength and a mental confidence which can be therapy to anyone whether they be able-bodied or not.**

## WOMAN WITH A WILL (continued)

all the obstacles that people can have in just doing the most elementary things that they have taken for granted all their lives. I look at disability not as a disability but as a challenge.”

**Kahla Stands-Reser called the Office of Handicapped Concerns this summer with one of those challenges. She rents a home in Alva which has two steps up to the front door to get her in and out. She needed a ramp built now that she got around in a wheelchair. As you can imagine, Kahla located all the traditional resources to get**

**a ramp built. She got a good estimate that labor and materials were going to cost her \$250 which was money she did not have. So, like many of you out there, she called us for suggestions to solve her problem. Marilyn Burr, another disability program specialist at our office took her call. Marilyn rolled up her sleeves and did some research. So, it looks like Kahla is going to get her ramp in spite of all the obstacles she has come across. But, how could it really work out any other way. Like we said, Kahla Stands-Reser is a woman with a will.**

**You live in the Deep South when. . . .  
ya'll is singular and all ya'll is plural.**

## Cinda Hughes, a Person of Ability (continued)

which has translated into the achievements we see today. She uses her job as a Receptionist/Research Assistant at the Oklahoma State Senate to demonstrate that people with disabilities have so much to contribute. “A lot of people obviously notice that I work with a headset and with a mouth stick, so it presents a great educational opportunity for just the general public who come into the office that people with disabilities want to work and do work and are contributing members of society.”

Cinda does not use her position in the Oklahoma State Senate to lobby lawmakers on disability issues. Her working presence says plenty. However, in her private life, she does advocate for people with disabilities. She says that people with disabilities who employ personal-care attendants do not receive federal tax incentives to help pay for these services. She believes they should. She points out that because of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other causes, one in three American Indians lives with a disability. (This compares with one in five of the general population who live with some

kind of disability.)

Steve Stokes, the Director of the State Office of Handicapped Concerns, states, “Cinda Hughes has contributed a lot to our Advisory Board. She was appointed by the Governor of Oklahoma and has a tremendous perspective as a person using public transportation and working in our world which in many instances is inaccessible to a person in a wheelchair. Cinda Hughes is not so much a person with a disability as she is a person with ability.”

All of us are born with our own special abilities. None of us are alike. There are things which only you can do. We have that special key to unlock a certain door. Someone is waiting for you to unlock that door so they can go in and use their key to open another door for someone else. I think Cinda Hughes is using her key, and she is unlocking doors for the rest of us. She has brought us into a room furnished with a beauty we have not known before. We can do the same for others.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

- October 15, 2003 Oklahomans on the Move transportation conference at Westin Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City sponsored by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority and the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services. Contact Tansy Diaz at 405-522-7393 for more information.
- October, 2003 Governor Brad Henry has declared October as Disability Employment Awareness Month in the state of Oklahoma. In his proclamation he underscores the energy, enthusiasm, and creativity that people with disabilities bring to the workplace.
- December 5, 2003 Turning Point conference to promote a healthy community for all Oklahomans. The conference is sponsored by Turning Point which is a coalition of 50 communities in Oklahoma. The conference will be at the University of Central Oklahoma student center in Edmond. Contact Karen Higgins at 405-271-6127 for more information.
- December 6, 2003 Wrightslaw training for families of children in special education. The Disability Law Center is sponsoring a one-day training on special education law, testing of children with disabilities, and IEP advocacy. The training will be at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma. For more information, contact the the Disability Law Center in Oklahoma City 405-525-7755 or 800-880-7755 or the DLC in Tulsa 918-743-6220, also 800-226-5883.

If you have an event coming up relating to disability, let us know at 800-522-8224 and we'll help you publicize.

**NOTEABLE WEB SITES:****OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS****[WWW.OHC.STATE.OK.US](http://WWW.OHC.STATE.OK.US)****STATE OF OKLAHOMA****[WWW.YOUROKLAHOMA.COM](http://WWW.YOUROKLAHOMA.COM)**