



# AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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## CHOOSING THE RIGHT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR YOU

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### CARM'S COMMENTS: Carmen Schacht

I made an interesting observation about three weeks ago when several people with disabilities were at a meeting. As we all lined our vehicles up, there were none that were modified the same way. One man with a manual chair has an extended cab pickup and he is able to fold his chair up, stow it behind his seat and go. A lady with a manual chair has a van that kneels and a ramp comes out; she wheels in and transfers via a 6-way seat and goes. Another lady has a Bruno lift that lifts her electric wheelchair into the back of her mini van and she goes. We just recently got a newer van that enables me to transfer my 6-way seat, hand controls and tie down for my scooter. We put in a new platform lift that I back my scooter onto. Once it lifts me up, I tie my scooter down, transfer to the seat and go. It

amazes me that there are about as many means of transportation as there are people with disabilities.

The whole secret of this is to get a dealer who really knows what they are doing and is someone you can trust. Visit with them to see what all is available and then go for it. It is wonderful that we don't have to stay home and look at the walls anymore; we are able to get out and go. A few years ago when I got so I couldn't get into our mini van, some friends and family were wonderful and did a benefit for us to get a van, as they couldn't see me sitting home. If you happen to get a dealer who does a poor job, just ask around so that you know where the good dealers are who care about you and not just their profit. Happy traveling! (CS)

### LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE - BEVERLY'S STORY: Brenda Reeves

Having lived in Iowa her entire life, Beverly Harter knew what steps to take when a tornado threatened. On May 16, 1999, Beverly and many members of her family were traveling by car when they found themselves directly in the path of a tornado. They ran from their cars into a ditch to seek shelter. As they huddled together, the tremendous power of the wind brought a bean head from a combine crashing down

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onto Beverly's back. At the same moment, her oldest daughter, who was also in the ditch, was struck and killed.

Beverly spent the next two months in the hospital undergoing surgery and rehabilitation. She faced many long and emotionally exhausting days as she struggled to deal with her paraplegia and the loss of her daughter.

Hospital staff helped her select a wheelchair appropriate for her size and needs. They also provided her with suggestions for assistive technology and resources. When you're in a situation where you have to buy these things, Beverly said, "there are a lot of things that you don't know enough about to ask about."

The truth in this statement became very clear soon after the accident when Beverly's husband purchased a van for her. The salesman assured him the van could be easily converted for a wheelchair lift. However, the Harters soon discovered this was not the case, and were forced to sell the van and take a loss. They didn't realize how important it is for consumers to be well informed before buying accessible equipment.

After learning from this experience, Beverly's husband purchased a used van that had already been converted. The vehicle is referred to as a "kneeling van" because the van itself lowers to the ground before a ramp folds out. Beverly, who loves to drive, is very pleased with the van and feels that it has helped her remain independent since the accident.

In addition to their other losses, the Harter's home and farm operation were destroyed in the tornado. They needed to build a new home, and were forced to live in a non-accessible trailer until it was finished. Building a home requires many decisions,

which, according to Beverly, were difficult because she was newly disabled and they were making purchases for a home that they didn't live in yet.

Beverly offered an example of one purchase she wishes she'd made less hastily. She bought all of the appliances for her new home in one evening, and says she didn't take time to thoroughly think about how accessible they would be for her. The washer and dryer Beverly selected were on a platform in the store, which she didn't notice. Once they were installed, she realized they were much lower than she'd anticipated. She suggests people think about how things are displayed in the store versus what level the user will be at in his or her home.

Beverly, who had worked for Harrison County Extension for 24 years, contacted that office for an information packet about universal design. She was familiar with the idea of designing a home that is comfortable and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Unfortunately, she says, the builders who designed her home had little or no experience designing for people with disabilities and "just didn't get it."

It was through her connections at the Harrison County Extension Office that Beverly became involved with Iowa AgrAbility. Chuck Larson and Lorrie Long, representing Easter Seals and ISU Extension, respectively, visited Beverly in the summer of 2000. They made suggestions about home modifications and offered advice about how to modify her lawnmower so she could transfer on and off of it. A bar was installed on the lawnmower so Beverly can pull herself onto the machine. In addition, Easter Seals provided Beverly with an electronic standing machine.

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Beverly, who now works part-time as a receptionist for Family Services, says "AgrAbility is very helpful and important." As she makes progress and grows stronger, she knows she has the full support of the AgrAbility staff, whose goal is to help farm families with disabilities stay engaged in life. (BR)

### RESOURCES:

The Iowa Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) operates an information and referral service on assistive technology called Info Tech. This service helps callers find resources for new and used assistive technology and funding. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/IPAT.htm> or call 1-800-331-3027 (319-356-0559 local).

To obtain a list of vehicle modification dealers in Iowa, visit <http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/TranList.htm>

For information about buying or selling used modified vehicles, visit <http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/USERS.HTM> and click on "vehicle accessories" or "vehicles with lifts/ramps."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers a useful online brochure for individuals interested in modifying a vehicle. <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/adaptive/brochure/index.html>

For further resources relating to vehicle modification, visit **disABILITY Information and Resources** at [www.makoa.org/mobility.htm](http://www.makoa.org/mobility.htm) and click on "transportation."

The University of Idaho produced a brochure with information and tips about purchasing a van lift. This publication,

titled "Van Lifts: A Practical Guide," is available online at <http://www.ets.uidaho.edu/ideatech/factsheets/vanlift18.htm> (BR)

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

The first Iowa Organic Conference will be co-sponsored by ISU Extension on November 29 at the Des Moines Area Community College Conference Center in Ankeny. The conference will provide information for established, new, and potential organic producers and marketers. Program details are available online at <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/sustag/> or by calling 1-800-342-0033 (515-964-6800 local).

How do you express kindness to someone who has a serious illness or is dying? ISU Extension offers an online publication that provides suggestions for friends and volunteer caregivers. "Expressing Kindness in Times of Illness and Death," along with other useful publications, can be found at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/fa.htm>

The Iowa Disability Advocates (IDA) is hosting a series of regional meetings at four sites around the state. They would like to develop a strong grassroots organization of Iowans with disabilities and their families. Membership is free. For more information contact Mike Hoenig at (319) 353-6448 or [Michael-hoenig@uiowa.edu](mailto:Michael-hoenig@uiowa.edu).

A reminder that ISU Extension operates the Iowa Concern Hotline, which offers a listening ear to families in times of crisis and changes. The 24-hour hotline is toll-free and provides assistance and referrals for stress, legal questions, and financial concerns for Iowa families. The number is 1-800-447-1985. (BR)

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### AGRABILITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

West Central Iowa AgrAbility Friends and Family:

--October 29, Crawford City Memorial Hospital, Conference Room A, Denison (LeRoy and Carol Haberl)

Freewheelers AgrAbility Friends and Family:

--November 10, 1 p.m., New Hampton Library, 20 W. Spring. Pizza party - join us! (Carmen Schacht)

Find the AgrAbility Friends and Family leader nearest you and give him/her a call if you would like to offer your support or share informally with other farm families with disabilities: Call Carmen Schacht, 563-547-2932, or access:

[www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html)

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IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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Web site: [www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/)

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