

## Better Service for Air Travelers

**One of the most frequent** complaints by air travelers with disabilities is regarding the personnel they encounter in airports and on aircraft.

Many people tell horror stories about how they were “handled” by staff who appear to be ignorant of or don’t seem to care about proper procedures when dealing with passengers with disabilities. A new program promises to alleviate the dismal service situation.

Beginning this month, Open Doors Organization (ODO), a Chicago-based



nonprofit, is offering a new Aviation Access Certification Program designed to improve quality and standardize service by airline wheelchair-service employees nationwide.

ODO Executive Director Eric Lipp introduced the new program at October’s Universal Access in Airports Conference in Seattle.

Airport wheelchair-service employees who complete this program will attain certification as highly qualified and trained professionals and be entitled to wear a special patch with the ODO logo.

They will help customers have a better experience through proper understanding of safe and courteous wheelchair assistance, with the goal of achieving higher customer satisfaction. Employees will also understand and be able to properly meet the needs of customers with sensory and cognitive disabilities as well as those of older individuals who may have multiple needs.

“Our aim in creating this new training and certification program is to help these employees do a better, safer job and to realize how valuable their services are, thereby enhancing the quality and experience for customers and employees,” Lipp says. “Now there will be a gold standard that includes training that was developed *by* people with disabilities *for* people with disabilities.”

The training program’s objectives are to:

- Train to provide high-quality customer service
- Use the human element of customers with disabilities in training
- Emphasize safety
- Minimize out-of-service training time
- Minimize additional training hours and costs
- Reduce customer service complaints

ODO will offer two certification programs: the initial one in January, and the recurrent certification program, ready for delivery

in 2014. Each will have two versions: Certified Access Provider and Certified Access Trainer.

By mid-2013, ODO plans to also offer Certified Transfer Specialist

refresher training each year; for Certified Access Providers, it’s every two years. This certification is not transferable, and the certified staff member must have a clean service record.

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certification for employees who specialize in the safe assistance and lifting of customers between wheelchairs, boarding chairs and airplane seats.

These training programs will incorporate people with disabilities in course development and specially created video clips and also as trainers in the Certified Access Trainer program. They will enhance and largely replace training currently provided by individual companies.

Gateway Group One, an airline passenger service company with 4,200 employees deployed throughout the United States, is the first to sign on for ODO’s training program. More than 1,500 are expected to enroll and become Certified Access Providers in 2013.

Under a recurrent certification program ODO will launch in 2014, Gateway’s Certified Access Trainers will receive

Open Doors Organization was founded in 2000 to create a society in which all people with disabilities have the same consumer opportunities as everyone else. Best known for its research on the disability travel market, ODO has developed and delivered successful training programs and videos for the transportation industry — airports, airlines, trains, motor coach companies and cruise lines — as well as for hotels, restaurants and cultural institutions.

For more information, visit [opendoorsnfp.org](http://opendoorsnfp.org) or call 773-388-8839.

## Airline Symposium

**In October, Boeing hosted** an airline symposium at its Customer Experience Center in Renton, Wash. Attending were 54 representatives from 12 airlines, including two foreign carriers, Aero-mexico and Qatar Airways.

Open Doors Organization Executive Director Eric Lipp described his group's initiatives to reduce damage to wheelchairs and unveiled a new belt loader device he helped design. Discussions included recent customer-service issues brought to ODO's attention and how to resolve them.

A highlight of the symposium was a tour of the center's mockups of the Boeing 787, 777 and 737 interiors. Among the huge 787 Dreamliner's features are two wheelchair-accessible lavatories (see "Acces-

sible Skies," Exploring Our World, May 2012).

For more information, visit [opendoorsnfp.org](http://opendoorsnfp.org).

## On the Road

**Starting last Oct. 29, large fixed-route motor coaches must be 100% accessible.**

More than 30 companies in the United States, including Greyhound, Megabus, Coach USA and Peter Pan, qualify as large carriers.

Customers who need a lift or ramp will no longer



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have to provide 48-hour advance notice. But if a trip includes travel via a small carrier, advance notice is still necessary.

How will you know if companies are large or

small? The Department of Transportation is scheduled to issue additional guidance and regulations.

For more information, visit [dot.gov](http://dot.gov). ■

## Join the Paralyzed Veterans of America

From August 27–29, more than 1,000 clinicians in spinal cord (SCI) and multiple sclerosis (MS) care will convene at the **Summit 2013 + EXPO** at the Renaissance Sea World in Orlando, FL, to advance the discussion surrounding key topics in spinal cord injury and disease care, treatment, and rehabilitation. Visit [www.pva.org/sponsorthesummit](http://www.pva.org/sponsorthesummit).

The **Wheelchair Games Expo** is a great opportunity to connect with more than 2,000 athletes, coaches, caregivers and healthcare professionals at the largest annual wheelchair sporting event in the world. Co-presented by Paralyzed Veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Expo kicks off the Wheelchair Games on Saturday, July 13 at the Tampa Convention Center. Visit [www.pva.org/expo](http://www.pva.org/expo).

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