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Review Website Launched to Connect Businesses to Consumers with Disabilities – <http://www.jjslist.com>

**JJ's List combines reviews and business profiles in a disability awareness directory to help
People with disabilities find the best, and the worst, in their communities.**

CHICAGO, Illinois – September 24, 2009 – People with disabilities are educated from pre-school through high school in inclusive settings, and prepared by teachers and families to become productive citizens. Like their peers without disabilities, these young adults are part of the Internet culture and, like their peers, they finish high school ready to continue their education, find meaningful jobs, make new friends and find a good place to live.

But when people with disabilities leave high school, they have almost no access to the regular experiences of community living, work and fun that those without disabilities take for granted. And a lack of day-to-day awareness by businesses and communities about how to interact successfully with people who have disabilities puts them at a major disadvantage.

JJ's List has launched to change all that. Inspired by what its founder calls a “can do” philosophy, visitors review the disability awareness of businesses at www.jjslist.com. Businesses are evaluated as to whether they are welcoming, flexible and respectful of people with disabilities.

There are other consumer review, directory websites on the Internet. Two examples are Angie's List (www.angieslist.com) and Yelp (www.yelp.com). But JJ's List is the first and only network of its kind designed specifically for the underserved and growing population of people with disabilities, their families, friends and co-workers.

Since its grassroots launch in March, visitors have posted almost 300 reviews of businesses in 47 Chicago and Chicagoland communities, plus a few in Wisconsin and Iowa. Visitors post their personal stories about their experiences shopping, dining, living, learning, working and having fun with businesses and services in their communities. Then they recommend – or not – a business as a Bridge Builder business, using a checklist of disability-aware characteristics, including:

- Physically accessible
- Talked to me person-to-person
- Asked me if I needed or wanted help
- Gave me choices
- Gave me extra time
- Respectful
- Helpful when I needed assistance or accommodation
- Has employees with disabilities
- Flexible service

Their reviews are posted on the Directory page of the website, which is a searchable listing of businesses, organizations and services that have been reviewed for disability awareness and/or have committed to incorporating disability awareness into their day-to-day service.

There is no fee to use JJ's List, and anyone can share a review or search the Bridge Builder Directory to find businesses that practice disability awareness. "I want to change the world with my reviews," says one user with cognitive and physical disabilities.

JJ's List offers businesses who are struggling for customers in the worst recession in more than three decades, a new way to attract this loyal customer base with discretionary spending power of more than \$175 billion annually. Almost any business, organization or municipal body can enroll as a Bridge Builder in the Directory to promote its commitment to disability-aware practices. A Bridge Builder business gets a complete business profile in the Directory, which includes a list of its disability aware features, such as:

- Physically accessible
- Adaptive technology
- Braille
- Extra assistance available
- Hires or would like to hire qualified individuals with disabilities
- Offer products or services for people with disabilities
- Sign language
- Trained staff
- Volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities

More than 50 Chicago-area businesses have already enrolled as Bridge Builders in the Directory as an expression of their commitment to disability aware service. Currently, there is no fee to post a Bridge Builder profile while the website builds a critical mass.

As the website brings businesses and individuals with disabilities together in one place, there is a growing demand by both groups for self-advocacy and educational programming. In response, Hanley conducts regular technology skills training and disability awareness workshops for individuals, groups, schools and organizations and businesses.

"The mission of JJ's List is to create positive interaction and communication between businesses and people with disabilities," Hanley says. "Working with that philosophy, everybody wins."

JJ's LIST FACTS

- JJ's List is a not-for-profit corporation registered in the State of Illinois.
- JJ's List was launched with a combination of private donations and a grant from New Trier Township.
- JJ's list was developed and built with and by people who have disabilities. It is managed and operated at this time 100% by volunteers with and without disabilities.
- The University of Chicago Booth School of Business selected JJ's List as a social entrepreneur project. The BSB team studied the concept, conducted a pilot survey and clarified the profile of the consumer user audience.
- Holland & Knight LLC and Smith & Associates, Ltd., both of Chicago, provided pro bono legal and accounting assistance.
- JJ's List has collaborative and advisory relationships with
 - Anixter Center - serves 5000 disabled individuals from all socio-economic communities in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs;
 - The North Suburban Special Education District (NSSD) - serves 19 suburban public education districts totaling 14,000 students,
 - New Trier High School - special education staff and students.
 - DisabilityWorks - an initiative of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
 - Keshet - Illinois-based disabilities education, vocation and recreation organization with national and international presence;

- The Institute on Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Legislators who have provided letters of support include Illinois Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, State Senator Jeff Schoenberg, State Senator Susan Garrett and State Representative Julie Hamos. Letters have been requested from Representative Elizabeth Coulson and Congressman Mark Kirk.
- The Center for Independent Futures (CIF), based in Evanston, IL serves as 501(c)(3) eligible fiscal sponsor to JJ's List until JJ's List's application is approved. CIF provides planning and integration services for people with disabilities.

DISABILITY FACTS*

- There are more than 50 million consumers with disabilities in the U.S. representing 18 percent of the population. That's almost 1 in 5 Americans.
- Millions of people with disabilities regularly travel, shop and eat out with family and friends.
- Discretionary spending power of people with disabilities nationwide is over \$175 billion annually, more than twice the spending power of teenage market.
- About 22 million families in the U.S. have at least one family member with a disability, and they vastly increase the size of this consumer group.
- The disability market is loyal to businesses with disability-aware customer service and accessibility.
- Four out of ten members of the traveling public are made up of Americans with disabilities and their companions.
- Approximately 4 million people have developmental disabilities nationwide.
- People with disabilities make up the fastest growing minority in the country.
- The number of adults with disabilities age 65 and over is projected to double by 2030.

*Figures compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau 2002, U.S. Department of Labor, Travel Industry Association survey of Americans with Disabilities, 2004.

About JJ Hanley

JJ Hanley is a writer, media producer and Wilmette, IL mom of a teenager who is emergent from autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities. In addition to founding JJ's List, she produced the multiple award-winning documentary *Refrigerator Mothers* for national PBS broadcast, about mothers of the '50s, '60s and '70s who were blamed by the medical establishment and the world at large for supposedly causing their children's autism. *Refrigerator Mothers* was inspired by Hanley's personal experience with mother blame by a pediatrician in 1996 and was produced by Chicago-based Kartemquin Films, documentary production company of Academy Award-nominated *Hoop Dreams*. (www.kartemquin.com).

Information about Bridge Builder Listings and upcoming workshops are at <http://www.jjslist.com> or by contacting JJ Hanley, 1229 Richmond Lane, Wilmette, IL, 60091, 847-702-4098 or jj@jjslist.com.

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