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HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE: Special wheelchairs allow people

with disabilities to get onto many Jersey Shore beaches

Seeing that everyone can be by the seaside

Posted by the Asbury Park Press on 08/11/07

BY HARTRIONO B. SASTROWARDOYO STAFF WRITER

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There's one more reason to visit the Jersey Shore: Nearly all the public beaches are accessible to people with disabilities.

The New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate publishes an annual guide to the state's beaches. While most of the attention following the release of the 2007 Guide to New Jersey Beaches has centered on the fees municipalities charge for beach use, the document also notes which beaches are accessible to people with disabilities.

The report notes that the Maryland Avenue beach in Point Pleasant Beach does not have access for people with disabilities, although the other public beaches in the borough are accessible. Monmouth County's Web site on beaches notes that Asbury Park's beach is partially accessible to people with disabilities.



(STAFF PHOTO: TIM MCCARTHY)

The big wheels on special beach chairs like this one (above and below left) in Ship Bottom make it possible for people with physical disabilities to get onto the sand at the Jersey Shore.

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"The county is in pretty good shape, but you can never do enough," said Barbara W. Steele, director of Ocean County's Department of Public Affairs and a Tourism Advisory Council member.

"People are sensitive to the issue," Steele said, "and they are always looking to do better," noting that many fraternal and community organizations have provided beach wheelchairs to different municipalities.

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The beach guide, as well as Monmouth County's Web site, lists municipalities that provide beach wheelchairs, which are usually made of strong piping material and have oversized wheels to traverse the sand.

In Ship Bottom, which has eight of the beach wheelchairs, "We get a lot of calls to get them. They go fast," said Nicole McGrath of Lacey, the Ship Bottom Beach Patrol receptionist.

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Some people reserve the wheelchairs for two weeks, the usual length for a summer rental, although it is possible to reserve one for the day.

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"We tell people to call as soon as they know (that they will need one), because they may not be available," McGrath said.

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The wheelchairs, provided free of charge, are available by calling either the beach patrol or borough hall. A driver's license number, summer address and cellular phone number are required when a wheelchair is taken.

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"All we ask is that they secure them overnight," or people can return them and pick them up again the next day, "and keep them within the limits of Ship Bottom," which stretches from Third to 30th streets on Long Beach Island, McGrath said.

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Keith Stokes, supervisor of beach operations in Ship Bottom and a borough resident, said the beach wheelchairs cost about \$1,500 each. This year, the borough received a state grant of about \$12,000, part of which went to purchase new wheelchairs, Stokes said, adding that people also make donations to the beach patrol for the wheelchairs.

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"We get a lot of public support because the wheelchairs do make the beach accessible," Stokes said.

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"A lot of people rent the same house all the time because they know it (the beach wheelchair) is available to them," McGrath said.

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