



ADA Live! Episode 95: Get Out & About! Accessible & Inclusive Outdoor Recreation

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Host: Barry Whaley, Project Director Southeast ADA Center

David Jones: Hi, I'm David Jones, and you're listening to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: (rapping) Yo. All right, let's roll. Let's go.

Barry Whaley: Hi, everybody. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA National Network, I want to welcome you to ADA Live. I'm Barry Whaley. I'm the Director at the Southeast ADA Center. As a reminder listeners, if you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can use our online forum any time at adalive.org.

Well, summer's here and after a year of social distancing due to the pandemic and quarantine, we're cautiously getting out again and looking forward to outdoor recreation, and recreation is important for all of us. Here to discuss how popular activities like boating, fishing, hunting can be made accessible and equal for everybody is our guest, David Jones. He's the founder and director of SportsAbility Alliance based in Florida. David, thank you for being with us today.

David Jones: Good morning. I'm glad to be here and excited to share some time with you.

Barry Whaley: Right. Well, let's start with SportsAbility Alliance. You're the founder, you're the director. Can you give us a little background on the organization.

David Jones: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a native of Tallahassee, Florida. Born and raised here. Very active outdoors person my whole youth and growing up. Worked in grocery stores, and I had my own business for a while. So outdoor recreation was not a profession. It was my hobby and my recreation outlet, but I learned to love the outdoors coming up.

In 1988, I was accidentally shot in a turkey hunting accident that left me in a coma for nine days. Not expected to live, not expected to walk, talk, or function. But I had a very extensive successful rehabilitation that lasted over a year, learning how to live again, which is what rehabilitation is. It's a new life starting over. So I actually, during this process of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, recovered way beyond expectation. So I've been blessed with the ability to get back to functioning and back to life.

One of the things that I did learn during that rehab process is how much I valued my outdoor recreation and what a source of comfort and motivation it was for me to heal in a therapy type setting. Recreation is used as a healing tool, and many rehabs utilize that on a regular consistent basis. Unfortunately, over the years, therapeutic recreation has, in many places, been downsized due to the healthcare crisis, insurances and reimbursements and treatments available. Hospital stays have shortened down to literally a few days instead of months.

I spent three months in a hospital so I had a very good therapy program back in the late '80s if you can remember. Things were different then. But anyway, I didn't realize how important that therapeutic recreation was to me at the time. Getting out and doing things with other patients in the hospital, playing games, socializing, having something to look forward to, to anticipate and know that I had something pleasurable coming up is a very

important part of life, not just healing, but in maintenance and staying healthy and for your well-being. Having recreation and exercise and social outlets is not just an extra benefit, it's necessary to be a well-functioning healthy human being.

Barry Whaley: Yeah-

David Jones: That's kind of how we started. Actually when I got out of my rehab, I was fortunate enough to have vocational rehabilitation help pay my way back to school. So I went back to Florida State University and finished my degree in the College of Business in marketing. And during those early days tried to figure out what I wanted to do and what my future would be. I decided, because of my experience, that I would try to create an organization that would help people like myself get back to living through outdoor recreation. So I started and formed the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, our past name, in 1990, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has evolved and changed over the years to now being called SportsAbility Alliance like you mentioned earlier.

Barry Whaley: As you said, we kind of take for granted the importance of recreation and leisure activities in our lives until we're faced with some sort of challenge of how do I participate, as you did after your injury. David, let's talk a little bit more about SportsAbility Alliance because you have a number of programs that are all aimed toward the common goal of inclusive recreation.

David Jones: I started off, and we'll back up to this in a minute, with a hunting program that I created here in the State of Florida, which was really my intent early on to really be more like a support group for people with disabilities to get involved with outdoor recreation, like hunting and fishing. Well, along the way, I met a young lady who was a world champion sit water skier, Anna Obrine-Satterfield, who wanted to share her joy for sit water skiing by doing clinics around the country. I did one of her first clinics here in Tallahassee for a group of maybe six or eight people with disabilities just to learn how to sit water ski. That event was so successful and popular that each year we continue the sit skiing, but continue to add new activities: boating, paddling, horseback riding, some of the typical athletic sports to that event.

So it became a very large two or three, well, actually a three-day event that we did annually around the State of Florida in different cities. Tallahassee every year, Sarasota, Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Orlando, Ocala, Gainesville. So we moved the event around the state and in doing so and promoting and advocating for ability in sports, which is what SportsAbility is, we gained quite a following and a branding of that name, SportsAbility for the event. So in time as our organization grew and our umbrella opened to cover more activities and more diversity in activities and interests, the SportsAbility brand became evident to us that that was who we were known for and recognized as. So we actually changed our name to the SportsAbility Alliance from the Florida Disabled Outdoor Association.

Barry Whaley: I guess I need a little clarification. David, do you have to be a member of SportsAbility Alliance? Or how do you connect with people?

David Jones: You only have to be a member if you want to get communications from us and take advantage of the resources that we share with people with disabilities, and just as importantly, providers of services that people with disabilities would be interested in.

We're very unique that we are different from most organizations that promote and advocate for disability sports. We really were founded and got started by providing support and consulting to government agencies to help them figure out how to comply with the new ADA law that passed in 1990. Old timers like me can remember the passing of the ADA and how confusing it was to a lot of providers of services. Government agencies and private businesses had to figure out how can I do business without discriminating. Well, I came through and did a very early prototype of a hunt for people with disabilities that Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission hosted. I was very excited to participate. I enjoyed it, but I was very disappointed in the support that it provided and the enjoyment or the quality of this hunt. It was a deer hunt for people with mobility impairments.

So I experienced that. Came back to create a better program. Approached the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge, which is just south of Tallahassee, and explained to them what I'd like to do. They embraced it because, as you may know, the federal government is responsible

for really leading the charge into how do we adapt and make sure that our programs are accessible. So I created a mobility impaired hunt program for St. Marks, had the nation's first national wildlife refuge mobility impaired hunt here. It has been very successful and grown and actually been replicated around the country as being really, I guess, a benchmark for how to provide a modified version of a hunting program. That's kind of how it started with the hunting.

Then as time progressed, moved into other activities. Got involved with fishing and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission saw what we did at St. Marks. They bought into the concept of creating a statewide program. So we now have created 24 different mobility impaired deer hunts around the State of Florida that literally thousands of people with mobility impairments can now enjoy as a result of that program.

Barry Whaley: Oh, that's fantastic. 24 individual programs.

David Jones: Yes.

Barry Whaley: So let's stick with hunting for a minute because a lot of people in the country love to hunt. I saw something the other day. There are over 15 million people who hold hunting licenses. Talk a little bit more about how we make hunting accessible for people and the different issues that you have to address.

David Jones: Okay. Yes. Very good question and issue to discuss because really, the answer is very suitable for all outdoor recreation activities if you think about it. The number one way that people with disabilities can participate in hunting programs is just like your neighbor next door who is able-bodied. Inclusion and taking advantage of what your state or your agency or local organization has to offer is the number one way of choice for people with disabilities to participate. So go to your fish and wildlife commission, whatever their name may be in your state, in your area, see what they have to offer. I know Florida has done a great job over the past 30 years, and I laugh because we're not done and we can always do better. Our organization, the FDOA or the SportsAbility Alliance, has been working hard to help providers of recreation.

We've helped them come up with ways to modify programs, ways to create better physical access, ways to really include people of all diversities and demographics, and disability being the largest, I would guess, call it the largest minority that there is. That's the number one way. Find out what's available, see what's offered. Most people do not know what's out there, and people with disabilities need to go and look at the regular tract as everyone else. That's number one.

The second way that you can get more involved with hunting activities is through assistive technologies and finding the tools and toys that enable a particular person with a particular individual need or disability to overcome that disability, remove that barrier through assistive technology is the great way to go. We have a lot of different mobility devices now for outdoor mobility, which is to me the most number one recognized barrier to participating in the hunting program is just the ability to walk. To scout the terrain, to learn the countryside, to make the challenging decisions of where you want to hunt, how you want to hunt, figuring out the game and the terrain. The hunting program really is a lot of man versus nature. Figuring out how you're going to become involved with nature and enjoy it and be successful and safe is part of what you do, and mobility is a big part of that when you are a hunter.

So, with some of the assistive technology, some of the all-terrain chairs, we now have trackchairs that are a wonderful accommodation, which really steps way above and beyond a typical wheelchair that you would see on the street and most even sports chairs. So trackchairs and other all-terrain vehicles are a great assistive technology.

Different shooting devices. Devices that will hold your gun up for you to shoot if you have a weak upper body or weak fingers or just need some support. We have many different available gun rests that can be attached to a chair or self-supporting it on a stand. That's another great way. The actual gun or weapon that you use, you make choices for what works best for you. Personally, being a one-handed hunter myself ... I'm a hemiplegic ... I guess I should've said that to start with ... My left side is paralyzed, my left leg and left arm. So I went to a basic little single shot gun that was very light, simple, easy to load,

easy to use. So that's what I went to a single shot, easy, simple gun to hunt with because most of hunting is not shooting.

Now, shooting is another sport that's very enjoyable, and a lot of people participate in shooting for the sport. I mean, that's a sport in itself. Hunting is really not about shooting. Hunting is about being in nature and enjoying that time with plant and animals and our earth at its best. The early mornings and late afternoons, the challenges of weather, that's what hunters really enjoy is being in nature. And doing that with family and friends is another part of the importance of hunting. Hunting with my son, and when I was younger, hunting with my grandparents growing up, that social interaction and that involvement is really what I think secures an appreciation for wildlife and conservation. Hunters are our number one conservationists. We as hunters put more conservation dollars into the budget than any other contributor. So no matter how big a conservationist you are with whatever philosophies of life you have, please recognize that hunters are paying the way, and fishermen, to protect our natural resources. That's an important thing to remember too with hunting.

Other ways that you can modify, not just with assistive technologies, but we can modify the program. So your agency that controls the hunting programs may put regulations or rules or accommodations into their regular programs. For example, here in Florida, we have created a mobility impaired certification that allows a person with a mobility impairment to get actually a doctor's note verifying that you have a mobility impairment. You then get certified, and then you use that certification to apply for special hunts. So special programs is another way that you can do this. Or getting accommodations to use your vehicle in regular inclusive hunts.

So those different changes in how we provide the program are important parts of hunting. The other thing would be the disability programs, the mobility impaired hunts, the private hunts that many agencies and organizations put on for people with disabilities. Certainly look for those, and they're out there. Google searches and watching on the internet, you'll find many opportunities. So it's up to the individual who wants to hunt how aggressive you want to be in finding those opportunities, just as it is for able-bodied people.

Barry Whaley: First of all, David, your comments about conservation and the role that hunting plays, that was just very well said. So thank you so much. So obviously David, when we're looking at adaptation or modifications, either a gun or maybe a bow or some other weapon used in hunting, seems like that's a very individualized thing. Based upon the need of the hunter and the choice of weapon, right?

David Jones: What you said there is the most important word in inclusion, and that's choice. Choice to do what you want to do, where you want to do it, how you want to do it, who you want to do it with. Choice is the bottom line and what inclusion is all about. So yes, making the best choices for your interest, your enjoyment, your capabilities is what it's all about. So finding the choices is what we should do, and that's what the SportsAbility Alliance does, try to help find those resources to send you to them.

Barry Whaley: That's very good. Thanks, David. ADA Live listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any other ADA Live topic, you can submit your questions on adalive.org, or you can call the Southeast ADA Center at 1-404-541-9001. We're going to pause now for a word from our sponsor for this episode, the SportsAbility Alliance.

Commercial: SportsAbility Alliance, formerly Florida Disabled Outdoor Association, enriches lives through accessible, inclusive recreation for all. Programs include ALLOUT Adventures, RecConnect, SportsAbility, and Miracle Sports. The SportsAbility Alliance strives to promote active leisure for life and improved physical, vocational and emotional wellness for everyone. For more information about the vital work of SportsAbility Alliance, please visit their website at www.fdoa.org.

Barry Whaley: Thank you. Welcome back everybody. Before that break, we were talking about hunting with David Jones. Now let's turn our attention if we can, David, to boating and how to make boating more accessible for people with disabilities. I have sailed sailboats most of my adult life and really find that this is something very interesting, I want to know more about.

David Jones: Yes. Well, I guess I'll start with the preface that same goes for boating or fishing or whatever we're talking about. The first [inaudible 00:20:32] you want to do is

look at inclusion. What exists right now for everyone else and how can I be included? So, yes, there's a lot of ways you can be included in boating. Some is in the assistive technologies. Boats are being designed for use for people with disabilities now, which is a great way to go. But early on what I found out in my rehab in my personal experience, one of the first things I did when I left the hospital for a go-home weekend trip, which was so exciting, I went to my mother's house who lived on a lake here in the Tallahassee area, Lake Talquin, to take a pontoon boat ride and to use my brand new electric fishing reel that I had bought in my therapy recreation research in the hospital.

So going home to spend the night, first time out of the hospital and to get on a pontoon boat and go fishing was like reintroduction to life again. My mom and my brothers and my support team could not get me on the boat so they had to build a sidewalk down a steep hill down to the dock and then widen the door of the pontoon boat so my wheelchair would fit onto it and build us a little platform to get into the boat. But, point is, a pontoon boat, most now are designed with wider doors, is the perfect assistive technology for person who has a mobility impairment and many other disabilities.

So, first thing I look at is what boat exists that you could use and enjoy participating in. Pontoon boats, if I was going to go out and invent a boat for a person with a wheelchair, that's where I would start. Right off-the-shelf pontoon boat. To improve upon that, a good friend and a program provider here in Florida, it's called Bird Dog Boats. Thomas Griffin has invented and built a boat branded as a bird dog boat because the hull was taken from an oyster clam fishing boat down in Cedar Key, where the stern of the boat, the back end, is completely open and level with the water and the engine's in the front of the boat. He took this fishing boat, redesigned it, put a center console so not only could persons with disabilities using wheelchairs could easily roll into the back of the boat without going over the side and then down into the boat and then reversing back over the sides and on to a dock or a shore. Now you roll straight off the dock or straight off the shore, straight into the low open back end of this boat.

He runs a program here taking people, mostly folks who use wheelchairs because it is such a specialized boat and demand's so great. So it's a great way to adjust and create

some assistive technology for boating. And that's for power boating. Sailing. Shake A Leg down in Miami ... Harry Horgan's a good friend of mine, and he has boats that have been modified for sailing. You mentioned you liked sailing, Barry. So there are boats that are sailing boats that have been mostly just modified so that people with disabilities can use them.

Then you get back down to your smaller craft. Paddling sports are big now. People love kayaking, canoeing. Paddle boarding is big. We now have, thankfully, boats and vessels that have been created for able-bodied people to sit on, which now enables a person who can't stand on a stand-up paddle board to sit on that stand-up paddle board and paddle just like anybody else.

Many times the best survivable, sustainable way to create an accommodated technology is by providing a product that's enjoyable and used by everyone, and that's universal design. So not only do we design our piers and our boat ramps and our facilities with a universal design concept, we should build our boats and our recreational tools and toys so they're universally accessible for everyone to enjoy.

Barry Whaley: That's interesting. So I think another time you and I had talked, David, and you had successfully won a case against Florida Department of, I want to say Wildlife. Something about their lack of accessibility of a boating program. Do you want to talk a little about that?

David Jones: I'll hit that very briefly because it is an important part of my history. Early on as we were creating programs for people with disabilities to enjoy the outdoors, we did a diving certification class here in Tallahassee. Did most of our work, actually all of our work, in a swimming pool. But we had about 15 people with different types of disabilities who went through the class and were ready for our checkout dive, for our final deep water dive. So to make it fun and exciting, I called down to John Pennekamp State Park down in the Keys to make a reservation to take our group out on their regularly scheduled, regularly provided scuba diving boat and program at the park. Everything was fine when I said I had 12 people coming, had the date all nailed down and ready to go. I said, "By the

way, I just want you to know so you're prepared." I think I said, "Four of my group will be using wheelchairs."

"No sir. Sorry, Mr. Jones. We don't allow wheelchairs on the boat." Remember, this was early '90s after 1990s, but that was the wrong answer. So I went up the chain to try to clarify with supervisors and what have you up the list and didn't get much progress on why you were not allowing my wheelchair users to actually go scuba diving like everybody else. So what I did was I found a boat in Miami with a lift on the back that would lift divers or anybody from the boat into the water very safely and securely and very functional. I actually chartered that boat to come to John Pennekamp to pick up our team and take us scuba diving.

Well, the state parks were very interested of course. So they kind of watched from afar. They didn't get involved. I teased it. I saw them standing on the hill with binoculars to watch the process. Well by I guess, fate or whatever, the boat that I chartered was the very same hull of the boat that the Pennekamp vendor was using to do scuba diving trips. So we showed them exactly how you could do this. I worked with them for two years to try to get the boat accommodated. And last minute, the ADA coordinator, who I'd developed a good relation with called me and said, "David, they've decided not to do anything until they're told what they have to do. And as you know, there's only one person that can tell someone what they have to do, and that's a judge." So basically they were telling me to sue them and I had never sued anyone. We had never sued anyone, but we did.

We sued the State of Florida for damages to discrimination against people who use wheelchairs that want to enjoy that regularly provided programs. Long story short, over \$2 million later and a lot of improvements to that park and to the whole park system, accessibility now is part of their culture and a welcoming environment is also part of their culture. Training is part of their culture. So that lawsuit as painful and undesirable as it was, did a lot of good for the State of Florida and probably the country.

So we did settle up and that's Florida Disabled Outdoor Association v. John PenneKamp, I think, in record. I don't remember the year, but a lot of good came out of that. That's really got our state parks in real good shape now. Again, I'll say, like I said earlier, it's only

been 31 years so we ought to be in pretty good shape. But we still have a long ways to go and it'll never be done. We have to continue working to make this part of our everyday expectations that we include everyone in our recreation.

Barry Whaley: That's very true, David. As a result of all of that, you've mentioned that, but just to reiterate the point, now Florida programs are among the most accessible in the country.

David Jones: I would say for my opinion, yes.

Barry Whaley: Because of you and your suit in large part because that is. So congratulations.

David Jones: Well, thank you. I think that's a small part because that was not the intention. The intention was to solve a problem. Many times people with disabilities are the best solution for the problem. So if we learn to listen to people with disabilities on how we can do a better job, I think we can do a better job.

Barry Whaley: That's very, very true. So we've talked about hunting, we've talked about boating. We haven't talked about fishing yet. I know you had mentioned fishing a few minutes ago, so let's talk about making fishing accessible.

David Jones: Okay. I'll start with my same little routine. Inclusion is the way to go. Find existing opportunities and enjoy them. But we have done a lot to improve fishing. I mentioned assistive technology as a way to accommodate and to modify fishing, and I also mentioned that the electric fishing reel that I discovered in my rehab became a motivation for me to get back out there and go fishing again.

Ordering that little electric fishing reel because I'm one-handed still after all these years enabled me to get out and fish very close to the way I used to do it with a little bit of assistive technology. But what it did was it provided the motivation and the opportunity to go participate, whether it was the catch-all easy way to catch a fish. No, it's still much more difficult. But that fishing reel and that pontoon boat ride from my mother's house really woke me up and made me understand that life goes on and life is good, and I can

find a way to do this. I'm outdoors. I'm with my family, my friends, the birds are flying, the fish are jumping, the weather's beautiful. I mean, that's what it's all about.

So yes, finding ways to do it assistive technology. We have electric reels. We have holders, harness holders, arm supports. There's quite a few different devices that have been invented by people with disabilities to accommodate their handicap, if you will. So look for those products. I don't have a list of them, but we do list a lot of them in our database, the iSearch, whatever we call it, database or check it out for some products. But the old internet and the Google thing works. You just have to be diligent and keep chasing and finding and look for disability and adaptive sports, and you will find some of the products. Many of them, you will be able to build on your own just like someone did to start with. So finding the idea and then figuring out how to make it work for you is what it's all about.

Barry Whaley: You know, David, we've been talking a lot about Florida-specific things and SportsAbility in particular. What if I'm in Idaho or Nevada or some somewhere else? How can people find local accessible recreation programs wherever they live?

David Jones: Again, going back to the searches and digging in is a good way. But we, the FDOA or the SportsAbility Alliance, was the first Florida chapter of what used to be Disabled Sports USA, which is now Move United. We are one of many chapters now. I think we have five here in the State of Florida. But I think Move United has, if I'm not mistaken, 175 chapters around the country. Any of those that you could find through their organization could give you a lot of support for their particular sports.

Most of those have an interest in a particular sport, and many of them are snow and mountain stuff, and biking and different sports. But that network can help you find some of the resources. Again, go to your state wildlife conservation commission. Our Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission has done a great job of fishing. They actually did a whole boat ramp project years ago. Went to every single boat ramp in the State of Florida that FWC has any involvement with as far as property or management, and they made all of our boat ramps accessible with handicap parking, barrier-free docks so that you can load and unload your dock ... Courtesy docks is what I'm trying to say.

They have provided now online a list of all those boat ramps around the State of Florida. So go onto myfwc.com, my Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. You will find through their conglomerate of clicks and leads and rabbit holes, a listing of accessible fishing piers and boat ramps for fresh water and, very excitingly, they're in the middle of completing an online database of accessible salt water fishing piers and shore-based fishing locations. I understand that one's not ready for the public yet, but the good news is they have listened and they are working very hard to provide information.

I'll regress a minute again. The number one barrier to participating is the lack of information. Knowledge. Knowledge is so important for opportunities, for the details. To participate, we need to know about it. So look for it.

Barry Whaley: That's great. Thank you, David. Any other advice you might have for somebody looking to be more involved in accessible recreation?

David Jones: Well, again, I'll go back to your local conservation commission. But there's many conservation organizations and groups out there who have programs. Hunting and fishing and boating are just three. Camping is big. Bird watching is tremendous. Biking is a tremendous outdoor recreation. So there's many, many things that we can do outdoors.

Fortunately in Florida, and I would assume other states as well, they are embracing a more diverse, I guess, population that they serve with diverse interests. So our management area system in the State of Florida, we have over five million acres of wildlife management areas that's open for hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, outdoor recreation. A vast resource scattered around the state. I think we're like the third largest controller of public land for outdoor recreation in the country. I mean, very big and don't hold me to the numbers because that's why I don't use stats with numbers, but Florida's done a great job and they're doing more and more to list some of the other activities and where you can do birding.

We have a birding trail where you can find all these hotspot birding areas around the State of Florida. And that's another point. Usually people who hunt or fish or boat are also outdoor enthusiasts. They do other things too. So wildlife watching is big. I mentioned

earlier, hunting is not shooting. It's enjoying the wildlife, and wildlife viewing is one of our biggest attractive sports. So yes, there's a lot of things we can do and finding a friend and we're creating now these mentoring programs for hunting and fishing. So look for the opportunities. They're there and they're getting better and better all the time.

Barry Whaley: That's great. That's great advice. Well, Dave, thank you so much for being our guest today. We're grateful for you sharing your time and your insights and talking about the valuable work of SportsAbility. I also want to thank you, ADA Live listeners, for joining us for this episode.

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ADA Live is a program of the Southeast ADA Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda with Beth Miller Harrison, Mary Morder, Emily Rueber, Marsha Schwanke and me. I'm Barry Whaley. Our music is from 4 Wheel City: The Movement 4 Improvement. We'll see you next episode. Happy summer everybody. Be safe.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

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