

July 27, 2005 Wednesday
Five-star Edition

SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 607 words

HEADLINE: Differences washed away;
No one short on smiles, fun at 15th anniversary of ADA signing

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BODY:

Courtney Bales, 9, braved the 96-degree heat on Tuesday, showing up on Market Square with a smile on her face and a fan in her hand to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Courtney, who has cerebral palsy, was one of almost 200 people who supported the "Walk, Rock 'n' Roll" event, sponsored by the Knoxville disAbility Resource Center.

"We're having a blast. All three of my girls raised money for the event," said Christie Bales, Courtney's mom. "The value of networking with other families is phenomenal. It's so important to know what the potential resources are in the community."

Tuesday's event included a walk around Gay Street to create awareness of people with disabilities, and more than 40 agencies provided informational booths.

"The message we're trying to get across is that people with disabilities can do what everyone can do," said Katherine More, independent living specialist at the disAbility Resource Center.

"It doesn't really cost a lot of money or any money at all to hire someone with a disability. We have degrees just like anyone else."

A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study shows that people with disabilities are often discriminated against when trying to rent apartments, according to a press release from the department on Monday.

The disAbility Resource Center helps place people with disabilities in adequate housing and provides assistance with employment opportunities in Knoxville.

"Our main focus is to help people be as independent as they choose to be," said Lillian Burch, director of the resource center.

"It's the right thing to include people with disabilities in our world. One in five people are effected by a disability, so some day you will probably have an experience with a disability through a family member or friend."

During Tuesday's rally, kids were entertained with a performance of "The Ants and the Grasshoppers," provided by interACT, a children's theater for the deaf.

Other children escaped the heat by playing in the water fountains or getting a little creative.

"This power chair can't get in the water," Courtney said. "But I can get water and just pour it on my head."

An obstacle course was set up for people to try a hand at opening a door and reaching buttons while in a wheelchair.

Michael Gibson, 15, showed people the course and helped them test their skills.

"The idea is just to show people what day-to-day life is like for someone in a wheelchair," Gibson said. "So far it's going very well."

Other people sold jewelry and crocheted items to support the disAbility Resource Center.

Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam and Knox County Commissioner Wanda Moody spoke in support of the Americans for Disabilities Act.

"I commend the center for their ability to bring this many people in to Market Square to create awareness," Moody said. "If you had asked me if this would be possible a couple years ago, I would have said, 'I'm not sure if it can.' This is tremendous improvement."

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MORE ON ADA

* President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law on July 26, 1990, describing it as "independence day" for people with disabilities to "pass through once-closed doors."

* The Knoxville disAbility Resource Center helps people with disabilities gain independence and assists the community in the elimination of barriers to independence. For more information, call 865-637-3666.

* A 13-minute video identifies common mistakes that small businesses make when trying to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The video may be found at the ADA Web site, www.usdoj.gov.

GRAPHIC: (Color) Regan Mills, 4, pushes her sister, Lilly Kimrey, 10, into spurts of water to beat the heat on Market Square at the "Walk, Rock 'n' Roll" event sponsored by the Knoxville disAbility Resource Center on Tuesday in celebration of the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Lilly has Angelman Syndrome, which has left her "mentally retarded and developmentally delayed," according to her mother, Leigh Ann Mills. PHOTOS BY JOE HOWELL/NEWS SENTINEL; DIGITAL PHOTO - ADA1.JH#4017.JPG

(Color) Daryl Johnson volunteered to sign at "Walk, Rock 'n' Roll" on Market Square in Knoxville on Tuesday. The event included booths from more than 40 agencies with information about the ADA and general services for the disabled.; DIGITAL PHOTO - ADA2.JH#4017.JPG