



Ms. Wheelchair AMERICA

presented by
Mary Free Bed Guild

AUGUST 17-23, 2026 | GRAND RAPIDS, MI

Empowering Women of Achievement Through Leadership, Advocacy & Education

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Ms. Wheelchair America 2026
Latavia Sturdivant



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passion for connecting with
what matters most.



Welcome to the 2027 Ms. Wheelchair America National Competition/Pageant

Welcome to Grand Rapids, Michigan!

It is with great joy that I welcome you to the Ms. Wheelchair America 2027 National Competition/Pageant. I want to congratulate the beautiful and impressive contestants on earning the honor of representing their state at the national level. Each has already demonstrated exceptional and powerful leadership, resilience, and a commitment to advocacy, and I am proud to celebrate this milestone with you.

This year is especially meaningful as we mark the 10th anniversary of hosting our national competition at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel. This venue has provided a first-class experience for our titleholders, families, volunteers, judges, and guests. We are grateful for ten years of partnership and unforgettable memories.

To our contestants, you are about to begin a truly unique journey. Over the next several days, you will challenge yourselves, grow as advocates, share your stories, and create lasting memories. Take every opportunity to learn from and support one another, and fully embrace each moment. The friendships you build and the experiences you share will be just as meaningful as the competition itself. While only one contestant will be crowned Ms. Wheelchair America 2027, each of you will leave with something equally valuable: an unmatched sisterhood. You are joining a community of remarkable women who continue to support and uplift one another long after nationals, and that bond is one of this organization's greatest gifts.

I extend heartfelt thanks to our sponsors, volunteers, Executive Team, Host Committee and the 2027 National's Team. Your dedication and generosity make this event possible and create an experience where each contestant feels welcomed, celebrated, and inspired. Your commitment strengthens our mission and empowers women who use wheelchairs to become leaders and advocates across our nation.

As we gather this week, let us stand united in our shared purpose: to amplify the voices of women with disabilities, to lead with courage and authenticity, and to inspire change in every space we enter. Together, we are stronger, and together, we are shaping a future where every woman is seen and heard for her LIMITLESS potential.

Thank you for being part of this extraordinary journey. Once again, welcome to Grand Rapids, welcome to the Ms. Wheelchair America family, and let this week be a powerful reminder that when we come together with purpose and passion, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Together, we continue proving that disability does not define our potential; it strengthens our voice.
With love & gratitude,



Mary Zendejas
President 2025 - Current
Ms. Wheelchair America





City of Grand Rapids, Michigan

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

DAVID LaGRAND
MAYOR

Dear Guests: Welcome to Grand Rapids – we are delighted to host you here in our city. While you no doubt have a full agenda, I do hope you will take time to explore Grand Rapids’ downtown and its dynamic neighborhoods. From a walkable city center with restaurants, shops, and museums, to endless outdoor options such as golfing, fishing, hiking and biking, Grand Rapids is a great place to both live and visit – and we’re so glad you’re here.

If you’re an art connoisseur, a walk downtown will take you by our Robert Indiana *LOVE* sculpture, and Alexander Calder’s *La Grande Vitesse* (more commonly referred to as “*The Calder*”) which is the first public work of art funded in part by the National Endowment of the Arts. Or if you need a break from the bustle of downtown, look no farther than one of our 75 City-owned parks, or take a stroll on a trail alongside the Grand River. And of course, as we are referred to as “Beer City USA,” a trip to Grand Rapids would not be complete without a stop at one of our many breweries that are located downtown and throughout our neighborhoods.

And that’s not all we’re known for – our metropolitan area is a knowledge center that boasts over a dozen colleges and universities. Plus, human medicine, medical education and health research make up our most rapidly growing economic sector – just take a walk up our Medical Mile to see this growth for yourself.

And yet, these comprise only a sliver of what makes our city so great – it is the people who live and work here who have made us who we are today and who have contributed to our success. We have been named as a Best City to Raise a Family and selected among the Top U.S. Destinations to Visit. We also have been recognized among the Most Exciting Midsized Cities and Best Places to Retire.

But don’t take my word for it – check it out yourself. The creative energy of our city – with its wonderfully diverse culture, vibrant downtown and dynamic neighborhoods – will inspire you. You will not find another city that matches our amenities and beautiful community spirit. Add to that the West Michigan friendliness of those who live and work here, and you will feel right at home.

On behalf of my colleagues at City Hall and all those who call Grand Rapids home, we hope you enjoy our city and have a wonderful time here.

Sincerely,

David LaGrand
Mayor, City of Grand Rapids



Dear Contestants, Families and Supporters,

On behalf of the Mary Free Bed Guild, welcome to Grand Rapids and to this year's Ms. Wheelchair America competition. We're honored to host a remarkable group of women whose leadership, advocacy and determination are making a difference in communities across the country. Whether this is your first visit to West Michigan or a return trip, we're delighted to welcome you for a week of connection, learning and celebration.

As the founder of Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation, the Mary Free Bed Guild has served people on their rehabilitation journeys for 135 years. What began in 1891 as a group of women working to ensure access to health care for those in need has grown into a lasting commitment to restoring hope and freedom through rehabilitation.

That commitment is one of the many reasons our partnership with Ms. Wheelchair America has been so meaningful. For more than 50 years, you have empowered women with disabilities to lead, educate and advocate for change. We're proud to work alongside an organization whose mission aligns so closely with our own. For me, personally, my own engagement in Ms. Wheelchair America began by attending an evening with contestants and becoming inspired by their passion and calls to better the world and only deepened as I had the opportunity to be a Ms. Wheelchair America judge. So many of my fellow Guild members have been enriched by serving Ms. Wheelchair America, and I hope that we continue to find new ways to work together with the women of Ms. Wheelchair America to make the world a better place.

This year is especially meaningful as Mary Free Bed prepares to open the new Joan Secchia Children's Rehabilitation Hospital. The hospital represents an investment in the future, ensuring children and families have access to specialized rehabilitation care for generations to come. In many ways, your advocacy reflects that same vision. The platforms you promote and the changes you inspire extend far beyond this week, creating meaningful opportunities for future generations.

Over the coming days, we encourage you to embrace every opportunity to share your story, learn from one another and building friendships. While only one contestant will take the title, each of you has already demonstrated exceptional leadership, resilience and a commitment to improving the lives of others.

Thank you for being here and for the important work you do every day. We're proud to welcome you to our community and look forward to celebrating with you throughout the week, and we cannot wait to celebrate this year's Ms. Wheelchair America, together.

President
Mary Free Bed Guild

The Mary Free Bed Guild

• maryfreebed.com • 235 Wealthy St. SE • Grand Rapids, MI 49503-5299



A Message from the President of Experience Grand Rapids

Dear Ms. Wheelchair America Attendee,

Welcome to Grand Rapids. Our city is recognized nationally as *America's Best Beer City* (USA Today) and as one of the *16 Midsize Cities You Don't Want to Miss* (TravelAwaits). Downtown Grand Rapids provides a streamlined and convenient meeting environment. Three major hotels—two of which hold four-diamond ratings—are connected to a state-of-the-art convention center via an enclosed skywalk. Within a 10-minute walk, you will find more than 150 restaurants, retail establishments, and entertainment venues, as well as:

- The 12,000-seat Acrisure Amphitheatre and Van Andel Arena, featuring nationally acclaimed entertainment and sporting events.
- Five distinguished museums, including the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum and the Grand Rapids Art Museum.
- A scenic riverwalk, notable historic districts, and extensive public art installations.

More than 100 additional hotels and meeting venues are located within a short drive of downtown, near:

- Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, recognized as one of the world's *Top 30 Must-See Museums*.
- Major shopping destinations such as Tanger Outlet Mall, Woodland Mall, Rivertown Shopping Center, and Breton Village Mall.
- The Grand Rapids Food Trail, highlighting 30+ notable culinary experiences across eight distinctive districts.
- Surrounding communities that offer diverse dining, retail, and entertainment opportunities.

For event information, personalized recommendations, and suggested itineraries, please visit **ExperienceGR.com**.

Thank you for choosing to visit our city. We are committed to ensuring that your stay is exceptional and hope you will share your experience with others.

Douglas Small
President & Chief Executive Officer

SPEECH NIGHT AUGUST 21, 2026



Welcome and Introductions



MWA 2027 Platform Speeches

CROWNING NIGHT AUGUST 22, 2026



Welcome and Introductions



Honor Roll Call of State Titleholders



Announcement of Top 5



Top 5 On Stage Questions



**Little Ms. Wheelchair America,
Dahlia Swanson**



Awards and Recognition



**Ms. Wheelchair America 2026,
Latavia Sturdivant**



**Crowning of Ms. Wheelchair America
2027**



HISTORY

Ms. Wheelchair America was founded in 1972 by Dr. Phillip K. Wood, a physician from Columbus, Ohio. It serves to promote the achievements and needs of individuals with mobility impairments and to recognize the accomplishments of women who use wheelchairs. The organization consists of State Coordinators and Titleholders. State programs are staffed and coordinated by dedicated volunteers who aim to increase public awareness, ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to lead productive and meaningful lives.

MISSION

Ms. Wheelchair America empowers women to lead as advocates for accessibility, inclusion, and disability rights by amplifying their voices, celebrating their achievements, and driving positive change in communities nationwide.

Empowering Women of Achievement
THROUGH

Leadership, Advocacy, and Education

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

The Ms. Wheelchair America Executive Team comprises a dynamic group of women who exemplify leadership, advocacy, and resilience. Each member brings a unique perspective and a shared commitment to empowering individuals with disabilities.

Together, this Executive Team leads Ms. Wheelchair America with a shared vision of promoting equity, accessibility, and empowerment for individuals with disabilities across the nation.

President Mary Zendejas



Mary Zendejas is a nationally recognized disability rights advocate, public servant, nonprofit leader, and three-time elected Long Beach City Councilmember whose life has been defined by perseverance, breaking barriers, and creating opportunities for others. For more than three decades, she has dedicated her career to advancing equity, expanding access, and improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities throughout California and beyond.

Mary was diagnosed with polio at just eight months old. Growing up with a disability shaped a lifelong commitment to ensuring that every person,

In 2019, Mary made history when she was elected to the Long Beach City Council, becoming the first Latina wheelchair user elected to public office in the United States. Since taking office, she has earned a reputation as a collaborative and results-driven leader, championing public safety, affordable housing, homelessness solutions, economic development, accessibility, infrastructure improvements, environmental sustainability, and investments that improve neighborhoods and strengthen local businesses.

Beyond her public service, Mary remains deeply committed to mentoring future leaders, supporting nonprofit organizations, and advocating for individuals with disabilities, immigrants, and historically underserved communities. Her leadership has always been rooted in the belief that public service is not about titles, but about creating lasting change and opening doors for others.

- Whether serving in a boardroom, a neighborhood meeting, a legislative chamber, or on a national stage, Mary has dedicated her life to proving that barriers are meant to be broken. Her story is one of resilience, determination, and service, demonstrating that leadership is measured not by the obstacles one faces, but by the lives one helps improve.
- regardless of ability, background, or circumstance, has the opportunity to succeed.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Mary earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from California State University, Long Beach, where she discovered her passion for advocacy and public service.

Long before being elected to public office, Mary had already established herself as a respected advocate and nonprofit leader. She created the CSULB MAPS 2 College mentoring program to help students with disabilities successfully transition into higher education. Throughout her career, she has served on numerous nonprofit boards, commissions, and advisory bodies focused on disability rights, affordable housing, transportation, education, and community development. Her work has consistently focused on removing barriers, building partnerships, and ensuring that all voices are represented in public decision-making.

Mary's leadership reached a higher level in 2012 when she was crowned Ms. Wheelchair California. Rather than viewing the title as a personal accomplishment, she embraced it as an opportunity to elevate the voices of people with disabilities across California. She traveled extensively, speaking to schools, businesses, community organizations, and civic leaders about inclusion, employment, higher education, accessibility, and independent living. Her dedication to disability advocacy naturally evolved into national leadership within the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization. For more than a decade, Mary has helped shape the future of one of the nation's premier disability advocacy organizations. She has served in numerous leadership roles, including Member at Large, Vice President, and ultimately President of the Board of Directors. Under her leadership, the organization has continued to empower women with disabilities, strengthen leadership development, mentor, titleholders from across the country, and expand opportunities for advocacy and public education. Her work reflects a long-life commitment to ensuring that future generations of women with disabilities have even greater opportunities than those who came before them.

ONCE A QUEEN
ALWAYS A QUEEN

-Mary Zendejas

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Vice President
Kathy Ford

Kathy, who lives with Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva, has used her personal experiences to become a strong voice for accessibility, inclusion, and disability awareness across her community and beyond.

Kathy first became involved with Ms. Wheelchair America in 2018 when she proudly represented her state as Ms. Wheelchair New Jersey. Her participation in the program sparked a passion for advocacy and community service, leading her to continue serving the organization in leadership roles, including New Jersey State Coordinator and now Vice President of the national organization.

As Vice President, Kathy works to support the mission of empowering women to become advocates for accessibility, inclusion, and disability rights. She is committed to helping create opportunities for women with disabilities to share their stories, develop leadership skills, and inspire positive change nationwide.

Outside of her advocacy work, Kathy enjoys spending time with her husband, Chuck, and caring for their many pets. She is also passionate about community beautification efforts, including local litter clean-up initiatives, and values creating a positive impact both locally and nationally.



**Director of Leadership and
Empowerment**
Shameka Andrews



Shameka Andrews is a passionate community outreach coordinator at the Self Advocacy Association of NYS and the founder of Disability Empowerment Consulting. She loves connecting with others through workshops on self-care, self-advocacy, and disability awareness.

In 2006, she celebrated a special achievement by being crowned Ms. Wheelchair New York. Since 2013, she has been leading the program with enthusiasm.

In 2017, she took on the exciting challenge of writing her first children's book, "Butterfly on Wheels." Shameka's commitment to empowering others and sharing her knowledge shines through in everything she does!

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Treasurer Kathleen Barajas



Kathleen is a Disability Rights Advocate, an accountant, and the President and Founder of Project AIR. She held the title of Ms. Wheelchair California in 2016. She has an impressive educational background, including an Associate of Arts in Business Administration, another in Media Arts, a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems, and an Advanced Certificate in Accounting. Born with cerebral palsy, Kathleen has passionately advocated for disability rights and has become a well-respected figure in the disability community.

She has rolled up her sleeves and actively participated in various committees, including LAX's Disability Access and Accommodation Advisory Committee, the State Council on Developmental Disabilities' Regional Advisory Council, and the Department of Rehabilitation's

Assistive Technology Advisory Committee. For Californians for Disability Rights, she served as President, Newsletter Editor, and Web Mistress in her early years of advocacy.

In 2020 Kathleen was appointed to the State Independent Living Council, where she was the Vice-Chair of Communication and Collaboration and State Plan for Independent Living Committees. She's currently the Chair of Los Angeles Metro's Accessibility Advisory Committee and serves as Vice-Chair for Disability Rights California. She's also assists with the finances for the Ms. Wheelchair California Leadership Institute!

Kathleen has many awards, including the Access Award from the LA County Commission on Disability and a Community Service Award from the Disabled Resource Center in Long Beach. She received the Lifetime Achievement Award during the Ms. Wheelchair America 2017 Pageant!

Kathleen is committed to advocacy for individuals with significant disabilities, especially those who use augmentative communication and need long-term support.

Member-At-Large Kristi Walden

Kristi hails from the charming town of Six Mile, South Carolina. She had the incredible honor of being crowned Ms. Wheelchair South Carolina 2023! Living with a brittle bone disease known as osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), Kristi has experienced over 500 broken bones, but that hasn't held her back. She's a proud mom to four wonderful kids, who are her greatest joy.

One of Kristi's biggest passions is making schools accessible for all children, regardless of their disabilities. She's currently the Vice President of the Ms. Wheelchair South Carolina state competition and is thrilled to support her fellow contestants as they create platforms centered around their passions. Kristi's enthusiasm and dedication truly shine through!



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Member-At-Large

Amber Marcy

Amber is a passionate advocate for individuals with disabilities, bringing both personal experience and professional dedication to her work.

At the age of 15, Amber's life changed dramatically when she was involved in a car accident that left her a quadriplegic. Rather than letting this define her, she used it as a catalyst to inspire change and support others navigating similar challenges.

In recognition of her advocacy and leadership, Amber was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Michigan in 2009, a title that allowed her to raise awareness about disabilities and amplify the voices of others in the community. During her reign, she was featured in the award-winning documentary *Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America*, which highlights the strength, resilience, and advocacy of women living with disabilities across the country.

Amber currently works with FirstLight Home Care, an organization that specializes in caring for individuals affected by spinal cord injuries and traumatic brain injuries. Her lived experience allows her to connect with clients and families, offering both empathy and guidance.

She has also served for many years on the board of directors at her local Center for Independent Living, currently serving as Vice President, she actively promotes accessibility, independence, and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Beyond her advocacy and professional work, Amber enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, volunteering in her community, spending time outdoors, especially in the summertime, and staying active in her church



If You Can't Stand Up **STAND OUT**

-Angela Rockwood

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Secretary
Angela Piazza



Angela Piazza is a dedicated advocate, leader, and community builder living in Redwood City, California. Born with cerebral palsy, Angela has used a wheelchair full-time for the past 18 years and continues to champion inclusion, accessibility, and independence in every part of her life.

Angela works with Family Housing and Adult Resources and serves on the Commission on Disabilities for San Mateo County, where she has held multiple leadership roles including President, Vice President, Secretary, and Special Events Coordinator since 2018. She actively participates in three monthly commission meetings, contributing her lived experience and passion for disability rights to countywide initiatives.

She earned her Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Sacramento State University and uses her education to support her advocacy work, especially around her platform: living inclusively and advancing the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Outside of her professional and advocacy commitments, Angela enjoys spending time downtown, being with friends and family, crocheting, visiting the beach, and participating in outdoor activities. She describes herself as caring, loving, and determined qualities reflected in her leadership, her community involvement, and the way she shows up for others.

There is no greater
disability in society than
the inability to see a
person as more.

Robert M. Hessel



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Executive Director Rebecca Sentell



Rebecca Sentell has dedicated her life to helping others discover that their voices matter. As the Executive Director of the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization, she considers it one of life's greatest privileges to serve an organization that has transformed the lives of countless women who use wheelchairs—including her own. To Rebecca, Ms. Wheelchair America is far more than a pageant; it is a family, a ministry, and a movement that empowers women to embrace their purpose, advocate with confidence, and create lasting change.

Professionally, Rebecca serves full-time as a Rehabilitation Specialist III with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, where she helps individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful employment. Whether serving participants in her daily work or leading a national nonprofit, her mission is the same: helping others recognize their worth and use their unique gifts to make a difference.

Above every title Rebecca holds is the one she treasures most—a follower of Jesus Christ. Her faith is the foundation of every decision she makes and the source of her hope, strength, and joy. Living life as a wheelchair user has deepened her dependence on God and strengthened her faith in ways she never imagined. She believes God never wastes our struggles and faithfully uses every circumstance for His glory.

Rebecca has been married to her husband, Leland, for sixteen years. Together they share a home filled with faith, laughter, unconditional love, and the joyful companionship of their beloved dogs, who always seem to know how to brighten their days.

Advocacy has been woven throughout Rebecca's life since childhood. From representing Easter Seals as a young girl to mentoring future leaders, educating legislators, and leading disability initiatives across the country, she has remained passionate about ensuring every person is seen, heard, valued, and included.

Rebecca believes true leadership is measured not by titles, but by lives impacted. She is deeply grateful to serve the women, volunteers, state programs, and supporters who make up the Ms. Wheelchair America family. It is her prayer that every woman who becomes part of this organization leaves knowing she is loved, created with purpose, and capable of making a lasting impact.

One of Rebecca's favorite verses is Isaiah 40:31: "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength..." To Rebecca, this promise is deeply personal. It reminds her that true strength is found not in physical ability but in trusting God completely. As a woman who uses a wheelchair, she has experienced God's faithfulness time and time again, and she knows He provides the strength to continue moving forward, no matter the obstacles. Her desire is to glorify Him through a life of faith, compassion, advocacy, and service.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA LEADERSHIP 2025 - 2026 STATE COORDINATORS

The Ms. Wheelchair America (MWA) state coordinators are the backbone of a transformative movement that empowers women with disabilities to become advocates, leaders, and changemakers within their communities. These dedicated volunteers, many of whom are former titleholders themselves, play a pivotal role in fostering leadership, promoting disability awareness, and building inclusive platforms across the nation.

Their dedication ensures that the MWA's mission—to celebrate the achievements and advocacy of women who use wheelchairs—continues to thrive and expand across the United States.

Combined, our State Coordinators have volunteered more than 100 years of passionate advocacy work for their state programs. This is a true testament to their dedication and commitment to the mission of Ms. Wheelchair America!

Ms. Wheelchair America extends heartfelt gratitude to our State Coordinators for their dedication and tireless efforts on their state programs throughout the year!!



Brooke Brown
Arizona



Angela Piazza
California



Carrie Greenwood
Kansas



Beth Bryant
Kentucky



Justina Plowden
Louisiana



Dana Lee Harp
Georgia



Chandra Smith
Maryland



Shanta Favors
Michigan



Rebecca Sentell
Mississippi



Tyra Randle
Missouri



Kathy Ford
New Jersey



Shameka Andrews
New York



Laura Sykes
Ohio



Leslie Keller
Oregon



Kristin Rebstock
Pennsylvania



Angela Young
South Carolina



Krystal Monteros
Washington



Karyn Burrow
Wisconsin

Ms. Wheelchair America Creed

As Ms. Wheelchair America,
I promise...

- to promote public awareness of people with disabilities,
- to use my time and efforts to this purpose,
- to strive to achieve the best that is within me,
- to offer my hand in friendship to everyone I meet, to be cheerful, honest and loving,
- to give hope to the less fortunate, to set an example by my attitude. and to do all this with grace, warmth, and dignity.





MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA NATIONAL TITLEHOLDERS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1973 - Patricia Nevins of Michigan | 1999 - Christina Gilmore of Wisconsin |
| 1974 - Caryl Jane Robinson of Texas | 2000 - Tracy Charlton-O'Connor of South Dakota |
| 1975 - Diana Kenderian of New Jersey | 2001 - Nicki Ard of South Carolina |
| 1976 - Dixie Lee Etheridge of Mississippi | 2002 - Candy Marsh of Colorado |
| 1977 - Beverly Chapman of Florida | 2003 - Catherine Gugala of Wisconsin |
| 1978 - Margie Sloan of Georgia | 2004 - Cinda Hughes of Oklahoma |
| 1979 - Marge Chmielewski of Michigan | 2005 - Juliette Rizzo of Maryland |
| 1980 - Nancy Pudvin of Georgia | 2006 - Kristen Connors of Rhode Island |
| 1981 - Vivienne Thompson of Massachusetts | 2007 - Autumn Grant of Massachusetts |
| 1982 - Marian Schooling-Vessels of Maryland | 2008 - Kristen McCosh of Massachusetts |
| 1983 - Barbara Crozier of Alabama | 2009 - Michelle Colvard of Texas |
| 1984 - Lori Cottam of Utah | 2010 - Erika Bogan of North Carolina |
| 1985 - Gaynell Colburn of Maryland | 2011 - Alexandra McArthur of North Carolina |
| 1986 - Donna Cline of Nevada | 2012 - Josie Badger of Pennsylvania |
| 1987 - Sandra Honbaier of North Carolina | 2013 - Mariah Kilbourne of Texas |
| 1988 - Peggy Simpson of Alabama | 2015 - Samantha Schroth of Wisconsin |
| 1989 - Jewell Massey of Georgia | 2016 - Allette Coble-Temple of California |
| 1990 - Kathy Garcia-Farnsworth of Utah | 2017 - Eliza McIntosh-Stauffer of Utah |
| 1991 - Mercedes Rodriguez-Fowler of Florida | 2018 - Sheri Melander-Smith of Minnesota |
| 1992 - Deanna Greene-VanHook of Texas | 2019 - Karen Roy of Louisiana |
| 1993 - Kim Mensi of Alabama | 2020 - 2021 - Hilary Meuhlenberger of Missouri |
| 1994 - Dawn Blodgett of California | 2022 - Christina Burke of California |
| 1995 - Wendy Petzold of Wisconsin | 2023 - Ali Ingersol of North Carolina |
| 1996 - Amy Baxter-Ley of Texas | 2024 - Chandra Smith of Maryland |
| 1997 - Elaine Stefanowicz of Washington | 2025 - Tamara Blackwell of Kansas |
| 1998 - Terri Cecil of Kentucky | 2026 - Latavia Sturdivant of New York |





LITTLE MISS WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

Dahlia Swanson

Dahlia Swanson, the 5-year-old Little Miss Wheelchair America, is a passionate advocate and a true tiny trailblazer who lives her platform every day: Play, Learn, Grow.

These three simple words shine through everything Dahlia does. She is committed to showing children and adults alike that, regardless of ability, everyone deserves the opportunity to show up, adapt when needed, and participate fully by playing, learning, and growing together.

Dahlia leads by example. She actively participates in adaptive sports, adaptive horseback riding, karate, and a variety of community activities. Through each experience, she demonstrates that disability should

never define a person's potential or limit their opportunities.

Despite being only five years old, Dahlia has already made an incredible impact. She has met with her state's Congresswomen, Hillary Scholten, participated in television and radio interviews, delivered speeches, walked in fashion shows, and shared her story and platform at numerous disability expos, community events, and news programs. Her confidence, enthusiasm, and joyful spirit inspire people of all ages to rethink what inclusion truly looks like.

Dahlia believes children learn best through play, and she wants every child—regardless of disability—to know they can learn, grow, and build friendships alongside their peers. Her message extends beyond children, encouraging adults to embrace inclusion as well. She reminds us that growth comes not only from our own experiences, but also from learning about others, discovering our own strengths, and building stronger, more connected communities.

Through her advocacy, Dahlia demonstrates that when we create opportunities for everyone to play, learn, and grow together, we build a world where every person is valued, included, and empowered to reach their fullest potential.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026



Latavia Sturdivant

At 33 years old, Latavia Sturdivant **made history as the first woman from New York to be crowned Ms. Wheelchair America** in the organization's 54-year history. While that moment forever changed her life, her story began decades earlier with a little girl whose future was questioned before it could unfold.

Diagnosed at 18 months old with **Spastic Quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy**, doctors told her parents that she might never walk, talk, or live independently. While those words could have filled a family with fear, Latavia's mother chose something different; she chose faith.

She believed God had a purpose for her daughter's life, long before anyone else could see it. From countless therapy appointments to celebrating every milestone, her mother became her first advocate, while God became the foundation that carried Latavia through every obstacle. Together, they taught her that a disability would never determine her destiny. Looking back, Latavia often reflects that every accomplishment in her life has been made possible by God's grace and by a mother who never stopped believing in her.

Raised in the Bronx and later in Yonkers, New York, Latavia learned early that perseverance opens doors. She earned her bachelor's degree from Lehman College in the Bronx, NY, and her master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Columbia University, becoming a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist in New York and Maine. Today, she serves children in New York City schools while also inspiring future clinicians as an adjunct professor at Lehman College.

Long before becoming Ms. Wheelchair America, Latavia discovered her passion for advocacy through education. She created and hosts the **Queens On A Roll Podcast, providing a platform where authentic conversations about disability, leadership, and belonging can thrive.** Whether speaking in classrooms, at conferences, or during community events, she found joy in helping others move beyond assumptions and recognize the value and potential within every person. This passion became the foundation of her platform, **Breaking Barriers Through Education and Leadership.**

When she arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for the Ms. Wheelchair America competition, she wasn't focused on winning a crown. She came to share her story, learn from remarkable women across the country, and proudly represent New York. Throughout the week, contestants participated in interviews, speeches, workshops, and leadership activities, but what left the greatest impression on Latavia wasn't the competition—it was the sisterhood. Women from across the nation came together with different experiences but one common purpose: to advocate for a more inclusive world. When her name was announced as Ms. Wheelchair America 2026, she accepted the honor with deep gratitude, knowing it marked the beginning of an incredible opportunity to serve, educate, advocate, and represent an organization whose mission she deeply believed in.

Her reign quickly became a year defined by purpose. Every opportunity—whether on a commencement stage, in a rehabilitation hospital, at a community event, or in the halls of government—became another chance to educate, advocate, and build meaningful relationships.

Throughout her year, Latavia delivered keynote addresses and commencement speeches, encouraging audiences to embrace resilience, lead with purpose, and never allow others to define their potential. She also participated in the **Abilities Expo, CP Community Day**, and numerous community events, connecting directly with individuals and families while demonstrating the importance of representation, accessibility, and belonging.



Her commitment to education also took her across the country. She participated in **Ski for Light** in Rapid City, South Dakota, where individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or have mobility disabilities come together to experience outdoor recreation, friendship, and independence. She also traveled to Mississippi to present at the **Mississippi Neurotrauma Symposium** and visit **Methodist Rehabilitation Center**, sharing her message of inclusion, advocacy, and leadership while learning alongside healthcare professionals, individuals with disabilities, and families from across the region.

While educating communities was one part of her mission, advocating for systemic change was another. Her advocacy took her from the halls of the New York State Capitol in Albany to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. In Albany, she worked alongside fellow advocates, providers, legislators, and members of the disability community to advance the New York State Medicaid Parity Bill, which passed both the Assembly and Senate for the second consecutive year during her tenure. While the work toward a sustainable solution continues, its passage represented another important step toward protecting access to durable medical equipment for New Yorkers.



Recognizing that meaningful change happens when diverse voices are heard, Latavia organized an advocacy trip to Washington, D.C., bringing together fellow advocates to meet with members of Congress and their staff. She invited Ms. Wheelchair Ohio 2025, Alex, to join her because she believes no one person can represent every lived experience. Together, they advocated for durable medical equipment reform and other federal disability priorities, demonstrating that the strongest advocacy happens when people with different lived experiences come together to ensure every voice has a seat at the table.



Her advocacy didn't stop in legislative offices—it reached living rooms across America. Throughout her reign, Latavia appeared on *PIX11 with Monica Morales*, delivered keynote presentations, participated in television, radio, podcast, and print interviews, and connected with communities across the country. Every appearance became an opportunity to challenge misconceptions about disability and encourage people to move beyond awareness toward action.

During her reign, Latavia delivered her TEDx Talk, *The Illusion of Inclusion*, and published her book of the same name, expanding on her message that true inclusion requires more than good intentions—it requires equity, belonging, and action.

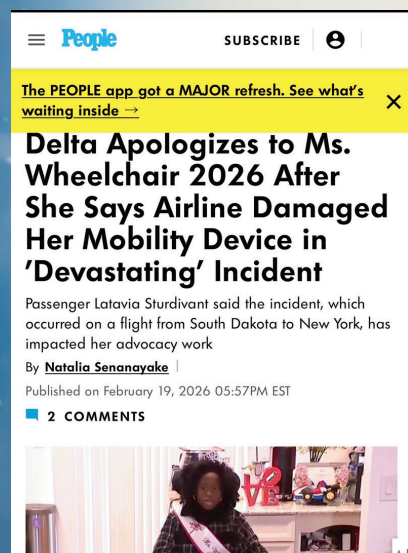


One of the most unexpected chapters of her reign came when Delta Air Lines damaged her customized power wheelchair—not once, but twice. What began as a deeply personal challenge became a national conversation about accessible air travel and the importance of protecting mobility equipment. Her story was featured by *People magazine*, *CBS News*, *ABC News*, *PIX11*, *News 12 Westchester*, and *1010 WINS*, helping millions understand that a wheelchair is not simply a piece of equipment—it is independence, employment, healthcare, and freedom. Rather than allowing adversity to define her, Latavia used her experiences to educate, advocate, and push for meaningful improvements for travelers with disabilities.

Looking back on her year as Ms. Wheelchair America, Latavia considers the greatest gift not to be the crown itself, but the people she met along the way—the students who asked thoughtful questions, the families who shared their stories, the fellow titleholders who became lifelong friends, and the advocates, providers, policymakers, and community leaders.

committed to creating a more accessible future. Every conversation reaffirmed her belief that meaningful change begins with education, collaboration, and a willingness to listen

Her personal mission has remained the same throughout every stage of her journey: *Breaking Barriers Through Education and Leadership*. Whether she was speaking to students, advocating before legislators, teaching future clinicians, or sharing her story through national media, Latavia's goal has always been to create a world where people with disabilities are seen for their abilities, their leadership, and their potential.



As her reign comes to a close, Latavia is excited to continue that mission beyond the crown. She is the founder of *Advocacy in Motion*, a consulting and public speaking organization dedicated to turning advocacy into action through education, leadership, and systems change. She is also the founder of *Silent Voices Rising*, a nonprofit organization committed to amplifying underrepresented voices, expanding access to resources, and transforming lived experiences into collective impact. While her year as Ms. Wheelchair America may be ending, her commitment to creating a more inclusive world is only just beginning.



Throughout her reign, she often reminded audiences of the message she first shared the night she was crowned:

"Don't pay attention to what I roll in. Pay attention to how I roll."

To Latavia, those words are more than a quote—they are a way of life. They are a reminder that true leadership is defined not by appearances, titles, or circumstances, but by character, purpose, and the impact we have on others.

A Message to the Competitors and the Next Ms. Wheelchair America

To every woman who competes, I always say, "The crown and sash don't make you—you make the crown and sash." If you are fortunate enough to wear them, remember that they are not the destination—they are the beginning. They are symbols of a much greater responsibility and a reminder that you have been entrusted with the incredible opportunity to educate, advocate, lead, and serve. Wear them with humility, purpose, and gratitude. They represent every woman who has come before you, every woman who stands beside you, and every life you will have the privilege to impact. Your greatest legacy will not be measured by the crown you wear, but by the lives you touch while wearing it.

To the next Ms. Wheelchair America, congratulations! You are about to begin one of the most extraordinary years of your life. Embrace every opportunity because this year will pass faster than you can imagine. Listen to every story, learn from every experience, and never be afraid to create opportunities where they don't already exist. Lead with faith, serve with humility, and remember that your greatest impact will never be measured by the title you hold—it will be measured by the lives you change.

As I pass the crown to you, my prayer is that you will continue building upon the legacy of the remarkable women who came before us. Together, we are stronger, and together we will continue proving that leadership has no limits.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Arizona 2026, Carla Sanders



Ms. Wheelchair Arizona 2026, Carla Sanders – Carla, also known as the "Warrior on Wheels," lives in Glendale, Arizona. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Business from Northcentral University and is a disability advocate, fitness ambassador, real estate entrepreneur, mother, and grandmother.

After a spinal cord injury left her paralyzed in 2018, Carla became a passionate advocate for accessibility, mental health awareness, and economic empowerment. Her platform focuses on expanding access to mental health resources, promoting accessibility, and advancing workforce inclusion and financial independence for individuals with disabilities.

Her interests include real estate investing, spending time with family, playing the violin, and enjoying outdoor adventures. Carla describes herself as resilient, compassionate, and unstoppable.

Ms. Wheelchair Arkansas 2026, Bailey Hunter

Bailey lives in Little Rock, Arkansas, and earned her degree in Christian Studies from Ouachita Baptist University. As a former college swimmer who became disabled during college, Bailey personally understands the powerful impact sports and recreation can have on confidence, identity, and community. Bailey volunteers in the inpatient rehabilitation unit at Arkansas Children's Hospital, where she supports children and families during their recovery. She also serves as an assistant swim coach for a Division I program and volunteers in adaptive sports and community programs throughout her area.

That journey inspired her platform, "Adaptive Athletics: Creating Opportunities to Belong," which focuses on expanding inclusive recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities and helping others experience the joy of connection through adaptive sports and recreation.

In her free time, Bailey enjoys wheelchair basketball, swimming, and spending time with family and friends. She describes herself as compassionate, determined, and encouraging.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027



Ms. Wheelchair California 2026, Dr. Sue ElHessen, Ed.D.

Dr. Sue ElHessen, from Bellflower, California, is an educator, disability rights advocate, and public servant dedicated to advancing equity, accessibility, and inclusion through ADA advocacy. A survivor of childhood polio, she combines lived experience with professional leadership to empower others and create meaningful change.

She earned her Doctorate in Education from the University of Southern California and has spent nearly two decades in higher education leadership. Dr. ElHessen previously served as Chair of Education and Outreach for the California Commission on Disability Access and authored Bellflower Unified School District's first Equity Policy. She currently serves on state and county leadership committees advocating for disability awareness, civic engagement, and equal access.

In her free time, she enjoys swimming, painting, and listening to music. She describes herself as intuitive, resilient, and intellectual.

Ms. Wheelchair Illinois 2026, Dr. Carrie Mulderink

Ms. Wheelchair Illinois 2026, Carrie Mulderink, PhD. – Carrie lives in Indian Head Park, Illinois, and formerly served as a professor at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, until its closure in May 2026. She earned her Doctorate of Philosophy in Intercultural Communication from the University of New Mexico.

Born with Cerebral Palsy, Carrie is a lifelong disability advocate dedicated to advancing the rights and protections of individuals with disabilities. Her platform, Bringing Awareness to and Criminalizing Caregiver Emotional Abuse on the National Level, advocates for stronger protections for individuals with disabilities who experience caregiver emotional abuse and for federal legislation addressing this issue nationwide.

In her free time, Carrie enjoys reading, watching the Chicago Bears, and listening to music. She describes herself as determined, intelligent, and empathetic.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Kansas 2026, Magda Carlos-Trevino



Ms. Wheelchair Kansas 2026, Magda S. Carlos-Trevino – Magda lives in Olathe, Kansas, with her husband. She is the CEO of MS Consulting & Training and a Bilingual Sales Specialist at WinPro Solutions Inc. Magda holds Business Administration credits from overseas and Legal Administrative Certificate credits from Johnson County Community College.

Born with Spina Bifida, Magda is a proud Mexican-American who brings a multicultural perspective to her advocacy and community leadership. She serves as Secretary of SILCK, Community Development Coordinator for SBKC, and a member of the Olathe Persons with Disabilities Advisory Board.

Her platform, "Roll Into Your Power: Be Your Own Advocate," promotes self-empowerment through civic engagement, independent living, and advocacy. She encourages individuals to embrace their whole identity.

In her free time, Magda enjoys studying human behavior and understanding the unique role each person plays in society. She describes herself as determined, empathetic, and a connector.

Ms. Wheelchair Louisiana 2026, Kristi Mascarella

Kristie lives in St. Gabriel, Louisiana, and serves with the Louisiana State Board of Examiners of Nursing Facility Administrators. She earned a Master of Science in Healthcare Administration.

Born with Spina Bifida, Kristie is a lifelong disability advocate dedicated to advancing the rights and protections of individuals with disabilities. Her platform, Educating the Public by Empowering Others, focuses on raising awareness about disability rights, accessibility, workplace inclusion, and stronger protections for individuals with disabilities. Through public speaking, community engagement, and advocacy, she works to ensure that people with disabilities are seen, heard, respected, and protected.

In her free time, Kristie enjoys fishing, attending car shows with friends, and spending time with her three dogs. She describes herself as independent, compassionate, and happy!



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Michigan 2026, Madison Reid



Madison is from Detroit, Michigan. She is a hairstylist with a dream of opening a fully accessible salon where individuals with disabilities can receive services comfortably, confidently, and without barriers. She believes beauty, self-care, and dignity should be accessible to everyone. As a TikTok content creator with more than 50,000 followers, Madison uses her platform to inspire others through her story of resilience, faith, and perseverance.

Madison is a passionate disability advocate whose life changed forever at the age of 20 when she survived gun violence and domestic violence after being shot by her boyfriend and left paralyzed. Despite unimaginable challenges, she remains grounded

in her faith and believes that God continues to bring healing, hope, and restoration. She often says, "My story is not defined by what happened to me, but by how I chose to rise from it."

Determined to turn pain into purpose, Madison founded the nonprofit organization Hope After Harm, which also serves as her platform. Through mental health awareness, violence prevention, and conflict resolution, she works to help others find hope, healing, and strength while encouraging positive choices and breaking cycles of violence.

In her free time, Madison enjoys creating content, connecting with others, and advocating in her community. She describes herself as encouraging, uplifting, and dedicated to serving others while creating meaningful change.

**EVERY PERSON
MATTERS
EVERY STORY DESERVES TO BE
HEARD**

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Mississippi 2026, Daraneisha Stewart

Daraneisha, is a native of Hazlehurst, Mississippi. She earned a Pre-ADN Associate of Arts degree from Copiah-Lincoln Community College in 2021 and later obtained an Associate of Applied Science degree in Business, Marketing, and Management Technology in 2024.

Daraneisha is a content creator, social media strategist, entrepreneur, and dedicated advocate. She is the founder of The Ready Experience, a platform focused on content creation, social media strategy, and personal development. She is also the founder of Elevation United Foundation, where she leads community outreach initiatives, including annual efforts promoting spinal cord injury awareness and disability advocacy. In addition, she volunteers with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and continues to expand her advocacy efforts through Open Mississippi, promoting community awareness, education, and outreach.



Following a cervical spinal cord injury at the C6-C7 level that resulted in incomplete quadriplegia, Daraneisha transformed her personal journey into a mission of advocating for mental health awareness, disability inclusion, and self-advocacy. Her platform, Mental Health Is Accessibility: Every Voice Seen, Heard, and Supported, focuses on creating safe and supportive spaces where individuals can heal, grow, advocate for themselves, and break the stigma surrounding mental health. Through community outreach, public speaking, storytelling, and her organization, Our Voices Matter, she works to ensure that people feel seen, heard, understood, and empowered.

In her free time, Daraneisha enjoys yoga, coloring, and watching movies. She describes herself as compassionate, ambitious, and resilient.

Ms. Wheelchair New Jersey 2026, Jessica Frew



Jessica is 24 years old and lives in South Hackensack, New Jersey. She has Spastic Dyskinetic Cerebral Palsy and uses an AAC device to communicate. Jessica studies Psychology and Criminal Justice at Rutgers University–Newark while also working at a law firm.

A lifelong advocate, Jessica has dedicated her time to volunteering with individuals with disabilities and educating others about disability inclusion. Her platform focuses on creating mandatory disability history education in schools and expanding disability awareness training for law enforcement, educators, business professionals, and medical providers. Through her advocacy, she works to combat ableism, increase understanding of disabilities, and promote safer, more inclusive communities.

In her free time, Jessica enjoys writing children's books, traveling, and modeling. She describes herself as confident, go-getting, and caring.

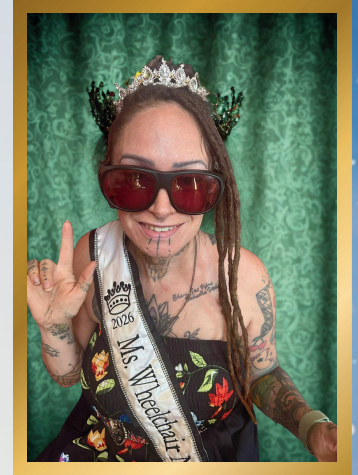
MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair New Mexico 2026, October Ramirez

October lives in Deming, New Mexico. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Barry University and volunteers with Deming Animal Guardians, where she combines her love for animals with her passion for serving her community.

October has been a fierce disability advocate since birth, living with a progressive, neurodegenerative disease. Although she experienced symptoms throughout her life, it was not until adulthood—following sudden vision loss—that genetic testing led to a diagnosis of Mitochondrial Encephalomyopathy, Lactic Acidosis, and Stroke-like Episodes (MELAS), a rare form of mitochondrial disease.



Inspired by her personal journey and that of her child who inherited this same neurodegenerative disease, October's platform raises awareness about the devastating impact of medical misdiagnosis, emphasizing that its cost extends far beyond financial hardship to include medical trauma, PTSD, diminished quality of life, and even loss of life. She advocates for expanded genetic testing in neonatal care and cases of complex medical conditions and symptoms to help inform them of what could cause certain issues earlier, believing that although genetic testing can be expensive, the emotional, physical, and financial burden of delayed or incorrect diagnoses is often far greater. Through education and advocacy, she hopes to improve outcomes for individuals and families by encouraging earlier diagnosis, informed medical decisions, and better preparation for the future. She deeply feels this when it comes to getting her child help after getting an earlier diagnosis, and with what she faced without having a proper diagnosis.

In her free time, October enjoys watching horror films, creating tactile art, and listening to music, which she says brings healing and peace to her life. She describes herself as persistent, empathetic, and realistic—qualities that continue to guide her advocacy and inspire those around her.

THE ONLY DISABILITY IN LIFE IS A BAD ATTITUDE

-SCOTT HAMILTON

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair New York 2026, Gesy Duran



Gesy lives in NYC, NY and is a proud Dominican Latina from Washington Heights. She is a wife, mother, entrepreneur, inventor of adaptive products for wheelchair users, adaptive athlete, and social work graduate from Lehman College.

After becoming paralyzed 10 years ago, Gesy experienced firsthand the challenges of finding accessible housing and inclusive communities. Her platform, Access from the Start, promotes housing, innovation, and inclusion by encouraging accessibility to be considered from the beginning, not added later. Through advocacy, education, and disability led innovation, she works to advance accessible housing, inclusive design, and greater representation of people with disabilities in community planning and decision making.

In her free time, Gesy enjoys painting, traveling, dancing, and playing sports. As the mom of an active 4-year-old, her favorite moments are spent cooking and making memories with her daughter.

Ms. Wheelchair Oregon 2026, Fabiola Noemi G Ayala

Fabiola lives in Medford, Oregon, with her mother, stepfather, and younger sister. A 2019 graduate of Phoenix High School, Fabiola has a passion for creativity and enjoys expressing herself through various forms of art, including painting, drawing, and diamond art. She also loves listening to a wide variety of music genres, including pop, rap, and Spanish music.

Fabiola was born with Spina Bifida and is also diagnosed with Hydrocephalus and Scoliosis. When she was five years old, her mother made the difficult decision to leave their home and family in Mexico and move to the United States in hopes of securing better medical care and opportunities for her daughter.



Inspired by her own journey, Fabiola's platform focuses on raising awareness and educating others about disability. Through advocacy and sharing her experiences, she hopes to promote understanding, acceptance, and inclusion within her community and beyond. Fabiola describes herself as compassionate, determined, and resilient.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania 2026, Jamie Clendening



Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania 2026, Jamie Clendening – Jamie is from Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, and recently earned her Bachelor of Arts in Healthcare and Medical Humanities from Wilson College. She combines her academic knowledge with lived experience to advocate for healthcare access and equity.

Jamie serves as a Regional Champion Advocate and Peer Mentor for the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, is a Certified Tourism Ambassador for Franklin County, and is the founder of I Can, and I Wheel, an online resource and support community that connects individuals with essential resources, therapy, and equipment.

Born with Spina Bifida and scoliosis, Jamie later underwent tethered cord release surgery, which resulted in her becoming a T-10 paraplegic. Her platform focuses on Healthcare Access Equity, ensuring individuals with disabilities have access to the resources and services they need to thrive.

In her free time, Jamie enjoys camping, creating art, and playing cards and board games with her family. She describes herself as caring, creative, and cautiously optimistic.

Ms. Wheelchair South Carolina 2026, Sarah Kinney

Ms. Wheelchair South Carolina 2026, Sarah Kinney – Sarah lives in Aiken, South Carolina, and serves as the Procurement and Pricing Manager for JANUS Research Group. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of South Carolina and is actively involved in her community through organizations such as the Aiken Choral Society. Sarah has also served as President of the Aiken Junior Woman's Club and Chair of Aiken Young Professionals.

Born with Central Core Disease, a congenital myopathy, Sarah has become a passionate advocate for accessibility and inclusion. Her platform, Protect the Space, focuses on protecting and promoting accessible parking while educating communities about its vital role in safety, independence, and equal access for people with disabilities.

In her free time, Sarah enjoys attending live music performances, reading, and traveling with her husband, John. She describes herself as warm, a little witty, and deeply committed to helping others feel seen, valued, and included.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027



Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2026, Whitney Lavender

Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2026, Whitney Lavender - Whitney is from Memphis, Tennessee, and serves as the Business Manager for Attitude MMA Fights. She is also the co-founder of AdaptAbility Home Services, the author of *Whit & Wheels*, a motivational speaker, and the host of the *Whit's Grit* podcast. Whitney studied Education at West Texas A&M University.

Whitney is a bilateral above-knee amputee due to complications from the rare disease Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS). Her platform encourages individuals to roll out of their comfort zones through adaptive martial arts,

demonstrating that challenges can be overcome with determination, resilience, and courage.

In her free time, Whitney enjoys hunting, practicing jiu-jitsu, and exploring the outdoors. She describes herself as passionate, witty, and joyful, and is committed to showing the world that everything is OVERCOMABLE.

Ms. Wheelchair Texas 2026, Elisha Aguirre

Elisha lives in Lubbock, Texas, and is a Licensed General Line Insurance Agent specializing in Life, Accident, and Health Insurance. She is a devoted wife to her husband, Shannon Norris, and a proud mother of four wonderful children. Elisha credits the love and support of her family as an important part of her journey and success.

She is actively involved in her community through organizations such as the Volunteer Center of Lubbock, the Patterson Library, Meals on Wheels, and Generations Church.

Elisha was diagnosed with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (AMC), a condition characterized by joint contractures, muscle weakness, pain, and fatigue.

Her platform focuses on Home Healthcare, Medical Insurance, and Life Insurance Awareness. Through advocacy and education, Elisha works to expand access to quality home healthcare services and help individuals better understand insurance options, including private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid. She also advocates for life insurance opportunities that allow families to plan for the future without affecting existing benefits.

In her free time, Elisha enjoys crafting, reading, and serving in her community. She describes herself through the motto "Let's Roll," which represents moving forward with kindness, connection, and purpose.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027

Ms. Wheelchair Virginia 2026, Alyssa Brown



Alyssa lives in King George, Virginia, and earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from the University of Maryland Global Campus. She was diagnosed with Spastic Diplegia Cerebral Palsy and has turned her experiences into a passion for advocacy, inclusion, and helping others feel heard and understood.

Alyssa volunteers with the Virginia Department of Transportation and is passionate about using her platform to advocate for equality in communication. She believes communication accessibility is essential in creating inclusive communities where everyone has the opportunity to connect, participate, and thrive.

In her free time, Alyssa enjoys painting, creating social media content, and spending time with her fur babies. She describes herself as passionate, adventurous, and loving.

Ms. Wheelchair Washington 2026, DeLena Perry

De Lena lives in Vancouver, Washington, and is actively involved in her community through volunteer work with the Here and Now Project, Clark County Accessible Community Advisory Committee (CCACAC), Peace Northwest, Assistance Dogs Northwest, Assistance Dogs of Hawaii, and Upstream Access. She earned a bachelor's degree in Human Services with a focus on Mental Health Counseling and plans to begin working on her Master of Social Work in the near future!

De Lena was diagnosed with AMSAN Guillain-Barré Syndrome at the age of 43. Her platform focuses on mental health and on learning to love our bodies through life's imperfections, encouraging self-acceptance, resilience, and emotional well-being.

In her free time, De Lena enjoys hiking, hand cycling, swimming, taking long drives to the mountains or ocean, and spending time with family and friends. She describes herself as passionate, motivated, and determined.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

CLASS OF 2027



Ms. Wheelchair West Virginia 2026, Heather Gillespie

Ms. Wheelchair West Virginia 2026, Heather Gillespie – Heather lives in Moundsville, West Virginia. Following a car accident at age 19 that resulted in an incomplete spinal cord injury and incomplete quadriplegia, Heather earned her diploma in Business Education and Accounting while continuing intensive physical and occupational therapy. For more than 27 years, Heather has been a dedicated advocate and educator, volunteering to raise awareness about spinal cord injuries, disability issues, and the dangers of drinking and driving. She is also a proud mother who spent 21 years raising her three children as a single parent. Today, she continues to serve her community as a disability advocate and educator.

Her platform, Accessible Transportation and Mobility, focuses on addressing transportation needs across West Virginia, including public transit in rural communities and personal and ground transportation options. Through her advocacy, she works to improve mobility and promote greater independence for individuals with disabilities.

In her free time, Heather enjoys painting, gardening, listening to music, and expressing her creativity through art. She describes herself as resilient, compassionate, and independent.

Ms. Wheelchair Wisconsin 2026, Kristi Scheunemann

Ms. Wheelchair Wisconsin 2026, Kristi Scheunemann – Kristi Scheunemann lives in Watertown, Wisconsin, and was born with Spina Bifida. She earned a technical diploma as a Business Software Application Specialist from MATC and has dedicated her life to advocacy, mentorship, and empowering others within the disability community.

Kristi works at People First of Wisconsin as a disability advocate and at Aptiv Inc. as a peer mentor. She has attended the Self-Determination Conference for several years and has served on the keynote speaker panel twice. In addition, she serves on the Board of Directors for Creative Community Living Services and is a member of the Advisory Committee for My Choice by Molina.



Her advocacy work includes speaking with legislators during Disability Advocacy Day and supporting accessibility projects within her local community. Kristi's platform emphasizes the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in schools, workplaces, and society as a whole.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

David Weinandy



David Weinandy, Ph.D., is a Professor of Communication at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For five years, he also supervised the Campus Life area at the College. Dr. Weinandy has been honored three times as The Outstanding Faculty Member by the AQ Student Senate and Alumni Association. Additionally, he received the Distinguished Service Award from AQ. A memorable moment in his career was when his former students initiated and funded an endowed leadership scholarship in his name. Before becoming a professor, Dr. Weinandy worked in Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University and Kent State University. Additionally, David received the Bowling Green State University Outstanding Alumni Service Award. David has earned a Bachelor of Science in Social Work, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Counseling, a Master of Arts in College Student Personnel, and a Ph.D. in Interpersonal Communication. David's expertise in the communication discipline includes: group communication, public speaking, and interpersonal relationship development.

Dr. Weinandy is an in-demand consultant and trainer conducting hundreds of seminars and workshops on such topics as listening skill development, creating a positive attitude, customer service, conflict management, public presentation, and successful interpersonal relationships. The Michigan Hospice and Palliative Care Association named Dr. Weinandy the Educator of the Year.

David serves as a personal communication coach for high-profile individuals. Additionally, David has been very involved in the West Michigan community as a volunteer and board member for numerous organizations including Community Circle Theatre, where he received the Norma Brink Service Award, the Bowling Green State University Alumni Association, Spectrum/Corewell Health, The Grand Rapids Ballet, The Van Andel Institute Purple Community, Lake Michigan Academy, Vox GR, and the Ms. Wheelchair America, Miss Michigan and Miss Michigan Outstanding Teen Programs.

Whether as a judge, member of the host committee or emcee, David loves interacting with the women from the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization. In 2025, David was honored and humbled to receive the Unshakable Voice Award from the Ms. Wheelchair America Board of Directors.

Be the person
**WHO
INSPIRES
OTHERS**

to be the best

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA

PAGEANT OFFICIALS

The judging panel is comprised of five distinguished individuals and a judge coordinator/timer. This week, each judge has had the privilege of engaging with every titleholder, gaining insight into their personal journeys and advocacy efforts. These discussions focus on the advocates' platforms, plans, and aspirations.

Ms. Wheelchair America employs thoughtfully established criteria when selecting the judging panel. Each judge contributes unique expertise, and we are committed to ensuring a diverse panel that reflects a range of genders, ages, ethnic backgrounds, and connections to disability.

In the interest of maintaining objectivity and fairness, judges are kindly asked to refrain from having individual conversations with contestants, their companions, family members, or friends.

Donny Frazier

Donny Frazier has more than 20 years of dedicated service with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services in helping individuals with disabilities achieve independence and success. Throughout the years, Donny has served in multiple leadership and service roles, including counselor, program coordinator, district manager, and regional manager. In each position, he has remained committed to empowering individuals with disabilities through advocacy, education, workforce development, and access to opportunities that improve quality of life.

In addition to professional responsibilities, Donny is an active member of the National Rehabilitation Association and a founding member of the Transition Specialists Division within the National Rehabilitation Association. He has also been actively involved with numerous organizations, boards, and committees focused on advancing services and opportunities for individuals with disabilities across various communities. A strong believer that people can accomplish anything they set their minds to, he has consistently encouraged self-determination, independence, and personal growth in the individuals and groups served.



He strongly believes in the mission and importance of Ms. Wheelchair America and the opportunities it creates for individuals with disabilities to participate fully in recreation, athletics, leadership, and community engagement. Through advocacy and involvement, he continues to support initiatives that promote inclusion, accessibility, and empowerment for all people with disabilities. He believes that the expression of beauty, support for others, and commitment to serve is consistently on display with Ms. Wheelchair America.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA PAGEANT OFFICIALS

Trinity Jagedo

Trinity Jagdeo is an award-winning nonprofit founder, author, illustrator, advocate, and motivational speaker dedicated to creating a world where children and families with disabilities feel seen, celebrated, and included. At just 17 years old, while still in high school, she founded the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization From We Can't to We Can, inspired by her lifelong best friend, Alexis Dick, who lived with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). What began as a desire to help one friend has grown into a movement that provides representation, resources, and unforgettable experiences for families across the country. Through her organization, Trinity has



published children's books featuring real kids with disabilities as superheroes, provided life-changing medical equipment and financial assistance to families in need, and created inclusive events that bring accessibility, belonging, and confidence to thousands of children and adults. Her work has been featured by Forbes, The Today Show, Woman's World Magazine, Upworthy, In The Know by Yahoo, NBC10, 6ABC, PHL17, and numerous other local and national media outlets.

Over the years, Trinity has spoken at schools, universities, businesses, and community organizations, sharing her message of inclusion, resilience, and the importance of seeing ability before disability. Her work has earned her recognition as a Russ Berrie Award recipient, The Halo Award recipient, a 30 Under 30 Trendsetter, an F4Y Humanitarian Award recipient, and numerous other community leadership honors.

At the heart of Trinity's story is her friendship with Alexis. The two met in kindergarten and spent nearly two decades side by side, navigating hospital stays, advocacy work, milestones, and life's biggest challenges together. Their friendship became the foundation of Trinity's nonprofit and inspired countless people around the world through their story of loyalty, hope, and perseverance. Following Alexis' passing in 2026, Trinity made it her mission to continue carrying forward the light her best friend brought into the world.

Through social media, Trinity has built a dedicated community of supporters who follow her journey as an advocate, author, and nonprofit founder. Her heartfelt storytelling has reached millions, sparking important conversations about disability inclusion, friendship, grief, and the power of community.

Today, every book, program, and event created through From We Can't to We Can serves as a tribute to the belief that every child deserves to be represented, included, and celebrated. Through her faith and work, Trinity continues to honor Alexis' legacy while helping families discover that their greatest challenges can become their greatest strengths.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA PAGEANT OFFICIALS

Dave Stevens

Dave may be the "Greatest Sports Story" never heard! Born without legs, he was a three-sport athlete in high school in Arizona and became the only legless college football (Augsburg University) and Minor League Baseball player (St. Paul Saints) in College and Pro Sports history. Dave worked in TV for over 40 years, winning seven Sports Emmy's during his 20 years at ESPN, and he appears in the Netflix movie, "The Saint of Second Chances." Dave has been featured hundreds of times during his life as a proud athlete and advocate for disability rights. A motivational speaker, Podcast host, father of three sons, professor and philanthropist, Dave's courage helps him to positively move through life without concern for any perceived limitations, while helping others to find their potential.



Jalynn Lassic

Hailing from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and currently based in the Ann Arbor/Detroit area,

Jalynn Lassic is a licensed funeral director and embalmer with a deep commitment to both her profession and her communities. With a compassionate and steadfast spirit, she has built a respected career in funeral service, offering guidance and support to families during some of their most difficult moments. Jalynn currently serves as the Program Coordinator for the University of Michigan-Anatomical Donations Program, focusing on donor and funeral home relations. She also is a Funeral Director on Staff for Chas. Verheyden, Inc.

Beyond her professional roles, Lassic is an active member of Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital Junior Guild, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Michigan Donor Family Council, University of Michigan Alumni Club of Detroit, Eversight Advisory Board, The Junior League of Ann Arbor, The Michigan Mortuary Science Foundation, and the Development Chair, and Board Member for Six Feet Over- an organization that supports families impacted by suicide. Further demonstrating her dedication to community empowerment and health advocacy. With strong ties to both her hometown and her current community, Jalynn embodies a balance of professionalism, empathy, and civic engagement-consistently striving to uplift those around her through both her work and her service.



MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA JUDGE COORDINATOR AND OFFICIAL ACCOUNTANT

Dr. Kimberly Barrington

Dr. Kimberly Y. Barrington is a U.S. Navy veteran, disability advocate, and Founder & CEO of 100 Shades of Diverse Abilities L3C. As host of Rolling On The Road and Founder & CEO of PPTV™, she is dedicated to advancing inclusion, leadership, and opportunity while empowering others to live with purpose.



Judge Coordinator - Kelsey Kleimola



Kelsey Kleimola is a former Ms. Wheelchair Michigan 2014 and 4th runner up for Ms. Wheelchair America 2015. Since ending her reign, she has remained active in the disability community as well as the Ms. Wheelchair America family. In 2015, she was appointed by Governor Rick Snyder to the Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council. She also gave a Ted Talk regarding mobility and mental health in 2016 for the Ypsilanti Library. Kelsey continues her advocacy in this field by working as a support staff for Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services.

Since 2014, Kelsey and her family have attended all but one competition of Nationals for Ms. Wheelchair America. This her 2nd time serving as Judge Coordinator.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA ACCOUNTANT - JOSEPH MARTIN

Joseph Martin serves as a Senior Data Architect at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation, where he is dedicated to providing essential data solutions and enterprise reporting for the hospital. As the leader of the data analytics team, he plays a crucial role in managing the official scorekeeping for the Ms. Wheelchair America Competition. For the past four years, Joseph has generously volunteered his time to collect and analyze scores for this meaningful event.

Ms. Wheelchair America is deeply grateful for the partnership with Mary Free Bed and appreciates the ongoing support. Together, both organizations are committed to inspiring hope and uplifting communities across the nation.



HOW IS MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2027 SELECTED

The selection process for the Top Five Advocates of Ms. Wheelchair America 2027 is conducted with integrity, fairness, and careful attention to detail. Each contestant is evaluated using the following criteria:

Application (10 Points)

Judges thoughtfully review each contestant's application, evaluating the professionalism, completeness, and quality of the information submitted. The application provides insight into each advocate's background, accomplishments, leadership experience, and commitment to the disability community.

Essay (25 Points)

Each contestant submits a 1½–2-page essay prior to the national competition. To ensure fairness and eliminate bias, essays are evaluated anonymously, with judges unaware of the author's identity.

Panel Interview (40 Points)

Each contestant participates in a 20-minute panel interview with the judges. This portion of the competition allows contestants to share their personal journey, advocacy experience, leadership philosophy, and knowledge of disability-related issues.

Platform Speech (25 Points)

Each contestant presents a speech highlighting her advocacy platform during the national competition.

A contestant's platform is a vital component of the Ms. Wheelchair America competition. It focuses on a disability-related issue or challenge about which she is deeply passionate and is committed to addressing through education, advocacy, and community engagement.

On-Stage Question (Top Five Only)

Following the announcement of the Top Five Advocates, each finalist will answer two on-stage questions, worth a combined total of 10 points.

This portion of the competition allows finalists to demonstrate their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and respond with confidence and authenticity under pressure.

The scores from the on-stage questions are added to each finalist's preliminary score. The contestant with the highest cumulative score will be crowned Ms. Wheelchair America 2027.

At Ms. Wheelchair America, our goal is to recognize and empower women who are exceptional disability advocates, effective communicators, and compassionate leaders. Our judging process is designed to identify the individual who best embodies the mission of our organization and is prepared to serve as the national voice for women who use wheelchairs across the United States of America.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2027 AWARDS

Ms. Wheelchair America 2027 is chosen by the judging panel. The advocate that earns the highest total score during the judging sessions will become Ms. Wheelchair America 2026.

Hope and Freedom Award is chosen by the Mary Free Bed Guild and awarded to the advocate who demonstrates hope and positivity in their life, advocacy, and a commitment to our mission of hope and freedom for all those living with a disability.

Judy Hoit Award This award is dedicated to the memory of Judy Hoit, a former Executive Team Member and Iowa State Coordinator of Ms. Wheelchair America. With over 20 years of unwavering commitment to the disabled community and the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization, Judy's extraordinary contributions and those of her supporters have left a profound impact. The award will be presented to an individual who has made a significant mark within the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization while embodying humility, selflessness, and perseverance. This award celebrates the individual whose remarkable efforts have truly transformed the lives of people with disabilities.

The Heart of MWA Award – Recognizes an individual whose selfless service, dedication, and commitment truly reflect the heart of Ms. Wheelchair America. This person is always willing to step in wherever needed, generously giving their time, talents, and encouragement to support others and strengthen our organization. They lead by example, serving with humility, kindness, and a genuine desire to help others succeed.

Ms. Congeniality Award is chosen by the advocates. Each advocate cast one vote for the person they feel was the kindest, friendliest, most helpful and caring throughout the week.

Outstanding Speech Award is chosen by those in attendance on speech night for the contestants that they feel delivered the most memorable speech of the evening.

People's Choice Award is presented to the advocate who receives most votes. Votes cost \$1.00 each and can be purchased in the weeks leading up to the National Competition until August 21, 2026. This year, forty percent of the funds raised will be distributed to the award recipients Ms. Wheelchair America state program while the remaining funds will be go the Ms. Wheelchair America Personal Care Fund.

The Spirit of Advocacy Award in honor of our Wheel Sisters who continue to roll in our hearts and have left a lasting legacy that we will always remember. The recipient is someone who speaks truth with passion and purpose, embodies determination, and is dedicated to sisterhood and systemic change

The Unshakeable Voice Award The Unshakeable Voice Award is presented in honor of David Weinandy, whose life demonstrates the power of meaningful communication, genuine compassion, and unwavering kindness. This award recognizes a titleholder who understands that advocacy is about more than speaking—it is about connecting with others. The recipient communicates effectively with people from all walks of life, treating every individual with dignity, respect, and understanding. She recognizes that the way we treat others matters. Through her words, actions, and attitude, she demonstrates compassion, extends kindness, and leaves a lasting impact on those around her. The recipient of this award possesses an unshakeable voice—one that uplifts, empowers, and inspires change. She uses her voice not only to advocate for herself but also to amplify others' voices, creating a stronger, more inclusive community.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026 TITLEHOLDER SPONSORS

MS. WHEELCHAIR ARIZONA 2026

CARLA SANDERS

- Kim Mathes
- United Access
- OAS Mobility
- Tessah Morris
- Dora Chavez

MS. WHEELCHAIR ARKANSAS 2026

BAILEY HUNTER

- Casey Spears
- Anita Drinnen
- John Mitcham
- Louis Weaver
- Susan Sheehan
- Megan Stallard
- Melanee Siebert
- Carol Armstrong
- Jeffrey Rosaasen
- Virginia Fredrick
- Michael Eganhouse
- Coleen and Bill Lee
- Kevin and Susan Kehl
- Joe and Sheila Simmons
- Chuck and Suzanne Floyd
- Kimberly and Kenny Hunter
- Jason Benish
- Edith Lilly
- Craig Crock
- Greg Liable

MS. WHEELCHAIR CALIFORNIA 2026

DR. SUE ELHESSEN, ED.D

- Judy Fike
- AsadAbulhusn
- Robert Kennedy
- Dunia Hamden
- Yolanda Castro
- Karla Makararem
- Senator Bob Archuleta
- Marcela Panduro

MS. WHEELCHAIR ILLINOIS 2026

CARRIE MULDERINK

- Kari Dillion
- Marylu Olsen
- Amy Nachel
- Ella Nachel
- Cindy Mares
- Matt Mulderink
- Jerilyn Mulderink
- Dr. Jennifer Rowe

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026 TITLEHOLDER SPONSORS

MS. WHEELCHAIR KANSAS 2026

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- KC Home Medical Supply
- Dialogue Coffee House
- MS Consulting & Training
- Ms. Wheelchair Kansas, Inc.
- Trevino Family and Friends
- Borrego Family and Friends
- Greater Kansas City Spinal Cord Injury Association
- SILCK – Statewide Independent Living Council of Kansas
- Olathe Persons with Disabilities Advisory Board
- Sweet Tees
- Laura Canelos
- Anna Purcell

MS. WHEELCHAIR LOUISIANA 2026

KRISTIE MASCARELLA

- Jared Pitchford
- Mr. Jim Lanier
- Superior Vans
- Danny David
- United Cajun Navy
- Mayor Did Edwards
- Lieutenant Will Steveson
- The staff at Unfiltered with Kiran
- Chris Wagley & Staff at CSC Customs
- Parish President Chris Daigle & Parish Council
- Lori White Candidate for District Court Judge

MS. WHEELCHAIR MICHIGAN 2026

MADISON REID

- Shanta Favors
- Pamela Reid
- The Healing Girl
- United Specialty Pharmacy
- The 400 Study Club
- Wheels in Motion
- Reimagine Life
- Kings Loving Care Home
- A Senior Promise
- Detroit Family Soul
- GDMC Financial
- Tracy Reid
- Alvino Cornelius
- Kathey Sheriffeld
- Nubian Mitchell
- Annette Wiseman
- Debra Basigner
- Bremerhaven Blackhawks
- Mind Over Matter Consulting
- Earthy Pest Control

MS. WHEELCHAIR MISSISSIPPI 2026

DARANEISHA STEWART

- Perry Hood
- Tillman Furniture
- Krystal Conn
- Albert Turnage
- Elise Monn
- Lisa Pirsuer
- LaQueena Arnold
- Tawana Welch
- BIAMS/USCAMS
- MWA (Angel Donor)
- Senator Johnny Dupree
- Pafford EMS of Mississippi
- Copiah County Medical Center
- Ms. Wheelchair Mississippi Foundation
- National Alliance on Mental Health – Mississippi
- Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Living Independence for Everyone of Mississippi

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026 TITLEHOLDER SPONSORS

MS. WHEELCHAIR NEW JERSEY 2026

JESSICA FREW

- Bernadette Frew
- Elizabeth Kelly
- John Kelly
- Simone Lane
- Kathy Ford
- David Zughaft

MS. WHEELCHAIR NEW MEXICO 2026

OCTOBER RAMIREZ

- Mimbres Physical Therapy
- Winborn Wellness
- Si Senors
- The Happy Camper
- The Cookie Jar
- Love Nail & Spa
- The Dog Spa
- Downtown Barber Shop

MS. WHEELCHAIR NEW YORK 2026

GESY DURAN

- Shapermint
- Jason Duran
- Natalia Mendez
- Derreks Bags
- NYSILC
- CNY Rotary
- Honey German
- Equal First Aid
- Nelly's Treats
- Erica Mirabal
- Claudia Mendoza
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- Hope Lutheran Church
- Dr. Cindy Bautista-Thomas
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- Our Community Podcast
- Sexy Disabled Folks Podcast
- R.A.I.N Home Care

MS. WHEELCHAIR OREGON 2026

FABIOLA NOEMI G AYALA

- Marissa Rock
- Leslie Keller

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026 TITLEHOLDER SPONSORS

MS. WHEELCHAIR PENNSYLVANIA 2026

JAMIE CLENDENING

- Pamela McNew
- 2B Accessible
- Cathy Campbell
- Jerry & Judy Brown
- Nicholas Sanders
- Christine Young
- Rose Dance Studio
- Minnequa Social Club
- Druff-Kuhn VFW 6168
- Clint & Heather Setting, Chloe
- Greencastle, Livestock Market,
- Lenita & Megan Dunlap-Wenrick
- Barry, Diana, Heather Holtry of Heather
- Parx Casino
- Jean Straka
- Kristy Jones
- Brooke Orner
- Brenda Fosnot

MS. WHEELCHAIR SOUTH CAROLINA 2026

SARAH KINNEY

- Ann & Paul Kinney
- Elizabeth & Brad Crain
- Tracy & Ryan Zigler
- Sarah & Anthony Galletta
- Bethany Bruder
- Kelly Whitener
- Karten & Dolores Bunney
- Ms. Wheelchair South Carolina Organization

MS. WHEELCHAIR TENNESSEE 2026

WHITNEY LAVENDER

- Hope Outdoors
- All Heart JiuJitsu
- Step Up Squad
- Jamie Grant
- Elite Boxing
- Kathy Ford
- Cyndi Leach
- Law School MMA
- Kimberly Mathes
- Attitude MMA Fights
- Knuckleheads Sidecar
- Deborah & James Bartosh
- AdaptAbility Home Services
- Ricky Pike - Anything is Possible
- Beauty by Jess- Jessica
- VentryArkabutla Physically Challenged Deer Hunt
- Golden Hour Mobile Spray Tan- Nicole Smith

MS. WHEELCHAIR TEXAS 2026

ELISHA AGUIRRE

- LIFE, INC
- AMCSI
- Educare-Rescare
- 5 Star Insurances
- Family and Friends
- Mobility City-Lubbock, TX
- Saavadra Medical Massage
- Lorene Rodriguez
- HWNT-Lubbock, TX
- City of Lubbock TX
- City of Plainview TX
- Todd & Mitzie James
- Aguirre's Plumbing Plainview, TX
- Generations Church Lubbock, TX
- Elks Lodge- Plainview, TX
- Refugee Services-Lubbock, TX
- Generation Church Women's Group

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2026 TITLEHOLDER SPONSORS

MS. WHEELCHAIR VIRGINIA 2026

ALYSSA BROWN

- Jordny Paseur
- mmmfxbg
- Marcia Wilson
- Caren White
- Mary Meade
- John Durrer
- Coral Bruce
- Carla Peterson
- Kristen Krause
- Nancy Wheeler
- Hello Threads
- Michelle Rawlings
- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Tracy Savoy "In Remembrance of PFC. T. Christopher Simms"
- Allen Campbell
- Toy Suon
- Paige Rosado
- Valor Ranch
- Jen Hackney
- Kathy Ford

MS. WHEELCHAIR WASHINGTON 2026

DE LENA PERRY

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- Joe and Sara Clemons
- Chris Jones
- Becky Taylor
- Michelle Huebner
- Julie Ponce
- Katie Brock
- Mary-Jane Yacoby
- Patricia Anderson
- Samuel Dallas
- Heather Garnett
- Emila Betea
- John and Mindy Boatner

MS. WHEELCHAIR WEST VIRGINIA 2026

HEATHER GILLESPIE

- Lori Carpenter
- Jonie Binni
- City of Moundsville
- Community Bank
- Original PJ's Pizza
- Lorrie Odonnell
- Mona Hall
- Dustin Bushnell
- Elizabeth Matsakis
- Brendon Ross
- Paulette Smith
- Leigh A Meeks
- Linda Simon
- Amanda Ekker
- Wood Healthcare Clinic
- Harvest Baptist Church
- Governor Patrick Morrissey
- First Settlement Physical Therapy

MS. WHEELCHAIR WISCONSIN 2026

KRISTI SCHEUNEMANN

- Barb Weiss
- St. Coletta of WI
- Aptiv, Inc.
- The Marquardt
- Easter Seals WI
- Building a Welcoming Watertown
- Rick and Brenda Scheunemann
- Rick and Diane Scheunemann
- Ryan and Chris Olson
- Ken and Morra Priess
- My Choice Member Advisory Committee
- Watertown/Beaver Dam Elks Lodge 666
- First Congregational UCC-Watertown, WI
- This Is How We Roll Fashion Show
- Spina Bifida Association of WI
- Creative Community Living Services/David Morstad
- Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

A SINCERE THANK YOU

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA SPONSORS

- Amway Grand Plaza
- Careline Medical
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- First Light
- Hope Network
- MobilityWorks
- Mary Free Bed Guild
- Mira Jourdan
- Ice Guru
- Derrek's Bags
- Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital
- Stephanie's Unlimited Creation
- Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park
- Ms. Wheelchair Mississippi Foundation
- Kellie Helter Photography
- Experience Grand Rapids
- Chasity Miles-Anderson
- DJ Short-e / Rynita McGuire
- Crescent Floral and Gifts

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA HOST VOLUNTEERS

- Susan Bloss
- Kristina Breon
- Chris Mills
- Jill Caruso
- Brandon Swanson
- Chels Lovett
- Shannon Howe
- Wade Rustin
- Kevin Kleimola
- Christine Burke
- Dawn Graeme
- Maggie Howard
- Brittany Flowers
- Holly Marie
- Beth Rustin

Special Thanks to
Lauren Hansen, Ms. Michigan for America and
Lainey Shepherd, Miss Mid Michigan's Teen
for all their help and support during the week of
Ms. Wheelchair America 2027

As Ms. Wheelchair California 2026, I embrace disability pride embracing who I am without apology and recognizing that Disability is a valuable part of human diversity. It is about celebrating our strengths, resilience, and contributions while advocating for a society where accessibility, equity, and inclusion are realities—not aspirations.

This year, Disability Pride takes on even greater significance as we celebrate the **36th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. Signed into law on July 26, 1990, the ADA transformed the lives of millions of Americans by establishing civil rights protections for people with disabilities and prohibiting discrimination in many aspects of public life.

For 36 years, the ADA has opened doors to greater employment opportunities, ensuring that I embrace disability pride: qualified individuals with disabilities have equal access to jobs and reasonable accommodations. It has improved transportation through accessible buses, trains, paratransit services, curb cuts, and other infrastructure that promotes independence and community participation. In healthcare, the ADA has advanced access to medical facilities, services, and communication accommodations, helping individuals receive more equitable care. In telecommunications, it has led to innovations such as relay services, captioning, and accessible technologies that connect people and break down communication barriers.

While we celebrate these achievements, Disability Pride also reminds us that our work is not finished. Too many individuals with disabilities continue to face barriers to employment, healthcare, housing, education, and full community participation.

My platform as Ms. Wheelchair California 2026 is focused on empowering young adults with disabilities to understand their rights under the ADA and become effective self-advocates. Knowledge is power, and when young people understand the protections available to them, they can advocate for themselves, pursue their goals, and help create a more inclusive future.

Disability pride is not about overcoming disability—it is about recognizing our inherent worth, demanding equal opportunity, and celebrating the unique perspectives we bring to our communities. As we honor the ADA's 36-year legacy, let us recommit ourselves to building a world where every person with a disability can live, work, learn, travel, communicate, and thrive without barriers.

Disability is not a limitation—it is a powerful part of our identity, our strength, and our journey toward a more inclusive world.

—Dr. Sue ElHessen, Ms. Wheelchair California 2026



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To learn more, visit <https://www.firstlighthomecare.com>

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Riding TOWARD Possibility.

There is something so simple, and so powerful about sharing a ride with your friends...it's something a lot of us take for granted. And something many of our Ms. Wheelchair America contestants rarely get to experience. That's one of many reasons why we are so proud to be even a small part of this incredible event.

Over the past four years, Hope Network has had the privilege of helping Ms. Wheelchair America contestants get where they need to go, together—making room for connection, conversation, and community.

As a healthcare and human services nonprofit, we are proud to facilitate moments that create and celebrate access, independence, and belonging. Because we believe that everyone is equally human, and we all deserve to live in a world where we can thrive.

Learn more about how Hope turns possibility into reality at [HopeNetwork.org](https://www.HopeNetwork.org)





THANK YOU

♥ to my Sponsors and Friends and Family ♥

YOUR SUPPORT FUELS OUR MISSION —
THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING IN OUR JOURNEY AND ROLLING WITH US.

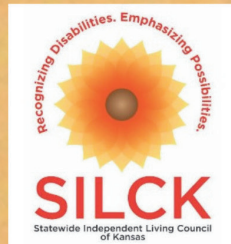


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EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP.
IMPACTFUL INCLUSION.



MS. WHEELCHAIR Mississippi

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WHEELCHAIRS

As you represent
Mississippi at
MWA 2027, know
that you carry
the love, prayers,
and pride of your
#ChairChick
family with you.

**GO BOLD.
STAY TRUE.
INSPIRE CHANGE.**

You are a leader.
You are an advocate.
You are a **ROLL MODEL**.

Daraneisha,
WE ARE
CHEERING
for you!

**MWA
2027**

We believe in you,
#ChairChick!

Your
Mississippi
sisters are
cheering
you on!



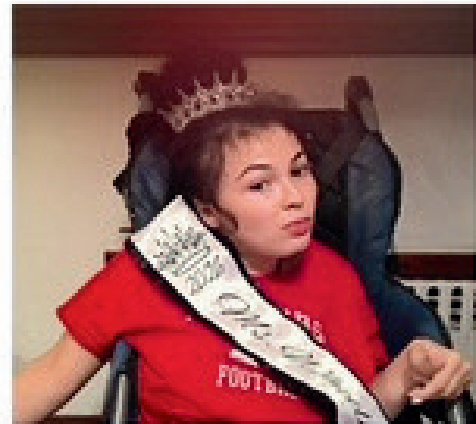
Wishing you
BLESSINGS

as you shine, speak, and advocate boldly
for all women in wheelchairs!

MISSISSIPPI IS PROUD. WE BELIEVE IN YOU. THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

#ChairChick Strong #WheelSistersForever

Congratulations to each advocate! We are especially proud of **Jessica Frew**, Ms. Wheelchair New Jersey 2026!





Ms. Wheelchair
AMERICA

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA
ORGANIZATION
would like to

= **THANK** =
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Not only does Ski for Light
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Mount Rushmore and
Crazy Horse for a tour!

“ Participants at the event say that
when Ms. Wheelchair America
is in attendance, it makes them
feel *special* and like they are
part of something *bigger*
than themselves!”



THANK YOU,
SKI FOR LIGHT!

To learn more about how you can be
a part of the Ski for Light Winter Event,
SCAN THE QR CODE TODAY!



Whitney Lavender



AUTHOR

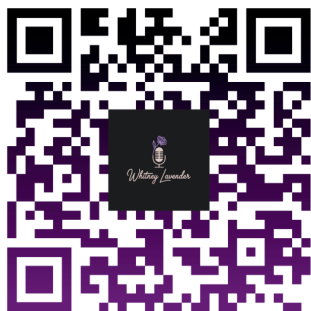
Whit & Wheels:
A Journey of Courage

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Everything in life is
OVERCOMABLE!

PODCAST HOST

Whit's Grit - Where
GRIT Refuses to Quit



*Thank
You!!*





Thank you!

Kimberly & Terry Mathes
Kathy & Chuck Ford
Elaine Stefanowicz
Barbara Meckel
Dawn Russo
Kathleen Barajas

We **appreciate** your
generosity in providing
some items from our
Amazon Registry to make
this week a success!



Ms. Wheelchair California
Leadership Institute



CONGRATULATIONS

Good Luck
Dr. Sue!

Ms. Wheelchair California
Leadership Institute
wishes you the best of luck!



Empowering Women. Advocating Change. Defining Beauty.®

Alyssa,

Your unwavering dedication to advocating for individuals with disabilities is nothing short of inspiring. Through your compassion, patience, and determination, you have become a powerful voice for change and a source of encouragement to so many. You see abilities where others see limitations, and you lead with a heart of empathy and purpose. Because of you, lives are touched, voices are amplified, and the world becomes a little kinder and more inclusive every day.

Never forget how proud I am of the difference you make. Your strength, grace, and commitment shine brightly, and your work leaves a lasting impact on everyone fortunate enough to know you.

With love, pride, and admiration,

Mom





Congratulations, De Lena Perry

Ms. Wheelchair Washington 2026



Wishing you every success as you represent Washington at the Ms. Wheelchair America Pageant. Your strength, leadership, and dedication to empowering others inspire us all.

From one Ms. Wheelchair Washington to another...

Michelle Drake, Ms. Wheelchair Washington 2005, inventor of the Drake Lock & Swivel, and everyone at Invomed LLC are proud to cheer you on as you take the national stage.

Although every wheelchair user's journey is unique, we celebrate women like you who advocate for independence, inclusion, and opportunity for all.

Best of luck at the
Ms. Wheelchair America Pageant!



Proudly Made in Washington.
Inspired by Real Life.



Invomed LLC is a Washington-based, woman-owned, disability-owned medical device company dedicated to improving the lives of people who rely on indwelling catheters through patient-centered innovation.

Invented by Michelle Drake, the Drake Lock & Swivel is designed from real-world experience to improve comfort, mobility, and quality of life.



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Patented Swiveling Retainer



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Silicone grip strips help keep band in place

Congratulations, De Lena!

Invomed LLC
Washington State

♥ Proudly supporting Ms. Wheelchair Washington and the Ms. Wheelchair America program. ♥

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Real Experience.
Better Patient Care.
invomedllc.com





**Empowering Women of
Achievement through
Leadership, Advocacy,
and Education
Since
1972**

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of Ms. Wheelchair America is an advocacy, education, and leadership-based organization that focuses on raising awareness about disabilities, celebrating the accomplishments of women who use wheelchairs, and educating society on architectural barriers that impact the disability community.

Enter A State Competition

Many States have programs that are part of the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization. Each active state program holds an annual competition to select a titleholder that will successfully advocate, educate, and empower all people on a state level.

Active State Program are:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| • Arizona | • Missouri |
| • Arkansas | • Oregon |
| • California | • Ohio |
| • Georgia | • Pennsylvania |
| • Illinois | • Rhode Island |
| • Kansas | • South Carolina |
| • Kentucky | • Tennessee |
| • Louisiana | • Texas |
| • Maryland | • Virginia |
| • Michigan | • Wisconsin |
| • Mississippi | • Washington |
| • Missouri | • West Virginia |
| • Nevada | |
| • New Mexico | |
| • New Jersey | |
| • New York | |

Become an Independent Delegate

An Independent Delegate is a woman who uses a wheelchair for 100% community mobility that creates a Ms. Wheelchair America program in the state they reside in by becoming a titleholder for their state and then starting a State Program the year after their title reign.

States that need an Independent Delegate are:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Alabama | • Montana |
| • Alaska | • Nebraska |
| • Colorado | • New Hampshire |
| • Connecticut | • North Dakota |
| • Delaware | • Oklahoma |
| • Florida | • South Dakota |
| • Hawaii | • Utah |
| • Idaho | • Vermont |
| • Indiana | • Wyoming |
| • Iowa | |
| • Maine | |
| • Massachusetts | |
| • Minnesota | |

If you or someone you know are interested in competing in a state competition or becoming an independent delegate for your state please email mwa@mswheelchairamerica.org for more information.

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ADVOCACY

Ms.
Wheelchair
AMERICA
2028

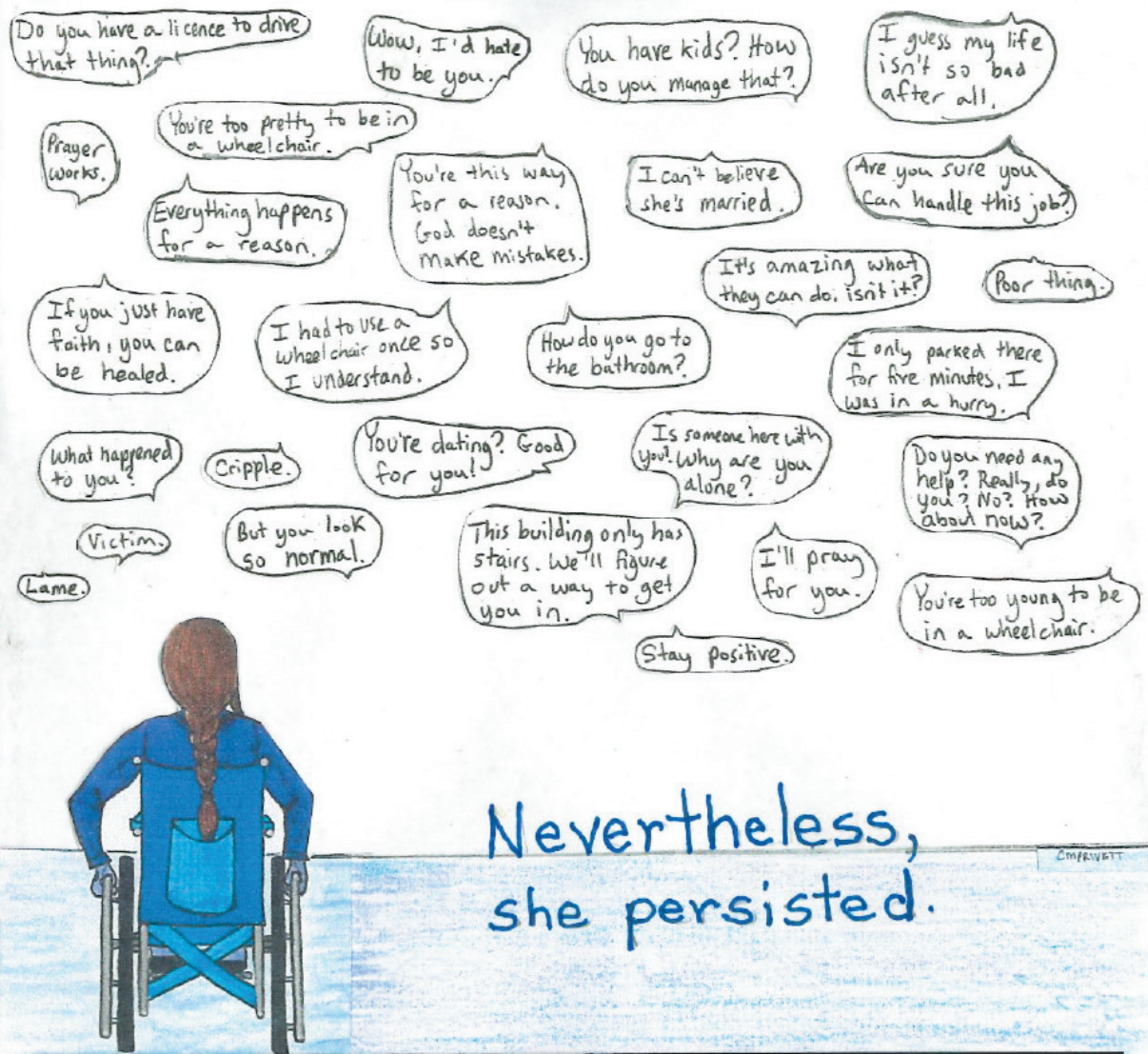
SAVE THE DATE:
AUGUST 15 - AUGUST 22, 2027
AMWAY GRAND PLAZA,
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

The



tells

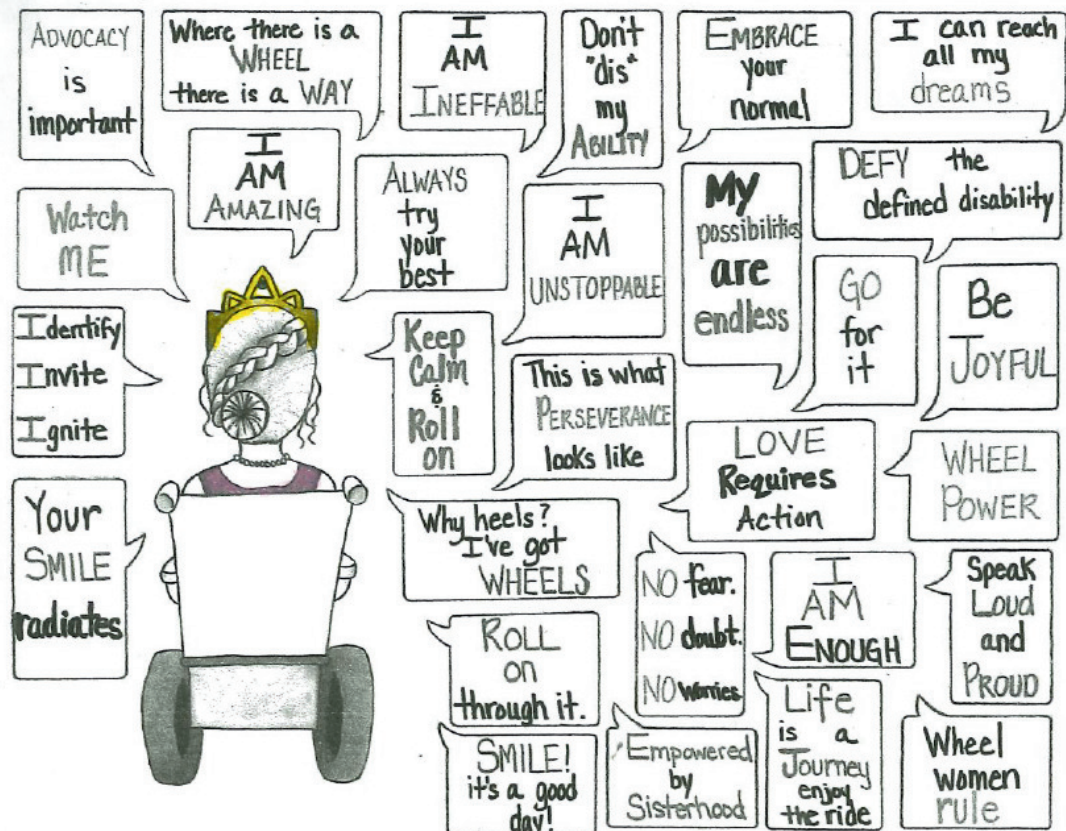
me...



Nevertheless,
she persisted.

Ms. Wheelchair
AMERICA

taught me...



135 YEARS OF GENEROSITY IN MOTION.



For more than 135 years, the Mary Free Bed Guild has been a force for good—empowering people, transforming lives, and investing in community health since 1891.

Like Ms. Wheelchair America, the Guild champions leadership, advocacy and inclusion. With more than \$25 million invested in local organizations, the Guild leads with heart and proves that true impact goes far beyond hospital walls.

We're proud to welcome Ms. Wheelchair America back to West Michigan—where joy, strength, and progress come together to move us all forward.

Learn more at MaryFreeBed.com/Guild



Mary Free Bed Guild
established 1891



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Joan Secchia Children's Rehabilitation Hospital

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