

‘Wheeling perils’

By BECKY CRUM – UCBLN & MentorABILITY Steering Committee Member

Shopping, attending community events or a stroll through the neighborhood can create havoc for people who use wheelchairs.

Anyone who has tripped over an uneven sidewalk can appreciate the fear that many citizens’ with disabilities encounter regularly. People in wheelchairs must find inclined curbs or driveways - putting themselves in traffic, risk becoming high centered or worst case scenario -- toppling over.

Sonja Wild has used a wheelchair for 15 years. She agrees that curb cuts designed for easy passage look nice; however many times they pose threats to wheelchair users.

“During the winter months, if a ramp is covered over with ice and snow I turn around on the street and back up the ramps,” she said.

Dustin Matthews who has been in a wheelchair for 27 years said another problem is dips between some curbs and roadways.

“Even on curb cuts, if the dip is deep, I use the street to the nearest parking lot to access the sidewalk,” he said.

Parked bicycles, outside eating spaces and sidewalk sales also create difficulty for wheelchair passage. Smaller chairs require at least 27 inches of width and larger chairs a minimum of 35 inches to pass.

Wild said there are several stores she would like to shop in, however they are not accessible to her either because she can’t gain access to them or they have narrow hallways, doorways, tight squeezes between store displays or small bathroom space.

“I’ve always wondered what the inside of the old post office looked like. Until recently, I wasn’t aware that there is a wheelchair ramp in back of the building. I’m sure more people in wheelchairs would shop there if they knew it existed,” she said.

Wild and Matthews said they are willing to accommodate any businesses who want them to ‘wheel’ around their stores to test accessibility of wheelchairs.

They can both be contacted through Wanda Rogers, Uinta County BLN & MentorAbility director at 783-6302.