

**State Bar of Arizona Committee on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Greenlee County Superior Court
Clifton, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Greenlee County Superior Court, P. O. Box 1027 (5th Street/Webster), Clifton, Arizona 85533

Date: Tuesday, May 25, 2004

Team: Carrie Sherman (team leader), State Bar of Arizona; Jim Reed, Jaburg & Wilk, PC; Sarah White, Student, Arizona State University College of Law.

Court Personnel: Cheryl Stephens Bowen (Clerk of the Court). Presiding Judge: The Hon. Monica Stauffer.

County Personnel: Kay Gale, County Administrator; Yvonne Pearson, Assistant Clerk, Board of Supervisors.



Overview

Built in 1911, this historic building is truly a gem. It sits on a hill overlooking the town of Clifton. The citizens felt so strongly about preserving the structure that they voted to approve the bonds required to fund its restoration. The courthouse was remodeled in 1998. The building across the street from the courthouse was also purchased in order to extend and upgrade the parking lot (see below).

Hearings are convened daily in the courtroom; however, only a handful of jury trials have occurred over the past several years.

Parking

A small (6 – 8 spaces) parking lot is located across the street from the main courthouse entrance. The lot is unpaved and is also sloped. There is one designated accessible space which is currently utilized by a court employee who has a disability.



There is an additional parking area at the bottom of the hill which is at the “base” of the courthouse. Entering the courthouse from this location requires a steep walk up the sidewalk.

Suggestion: Designating an additional accessible space in the small parking lot for the general public is recommended. Signage for this purpose is relatively inexpensive. Barring budgetary restraints, it would be ideal if this lot was paved and on a more even grade for ease of mobility. As previously noted, an expansion of and improvement to the lot is already planned.

Entrances and Exits

The parking lot and courthouse are separated by a city street which is sloped. Although not a long distance from the parking lot to the front entrance, those individuals who have a mobility disability may find this route challenging.

One enters the courthouse up a flight a stairs. Alternatively, a ramp extends around the corner of the building which descends to a lower level floor of the courthouse. Doors at both of these entrances are heavy and fast closing.



Suggestion: A simple readjustment to the tension on both doors would provide easier access.

Security

As has been noted by the accessibility teams, courthouses in rural small communities do not usually have a designated security station through which individuals pass. Emergency evacuation signage was prominent, however, and fire alarms that flash in an emergency were also evident throughout the facility.

Court Administration

The clerk's office is located on the second floor. The service area of this office is small, but large enough in which a person using a wheelchair, scooter or walker can turn around.

Pamphlets providing information on court and social services-related programs were available in racks in the hallway by the county attorney's office. The team was not aware of any specific pamphlet detailing court-related services for persons with disabilities. As previously



noted, hearings occur daily in the courtroom. Notices sent to hearing participants could include the name and phone number of court staff, if this information is not already included, who would be able to make arrangements for special accommodations.

Filing Counters

There is one counter which appeared high. Staff can easily come out around the counter, from their workstations, to assist an individual using a wheelchair, scooter or walker. A low cutout segment of the counter would, of course, be ideal to serve a person of low height or who uses a mobility assistive device.

Restrooms

The restrooms on the lower level/first floor are not totally accessible; however, accessible restrooms are located on the second and third floors. These upper level restrooms, which used to have two stalls, now feature one toilet (no stall) which provides more than ample space to accommodate a person using a wheelchair. Towel and soap dispensers are at low levels and grab bars are available. The doors have wing handles.



Suggestion: Post signage (especially by the restrooms on the lower first floor) directing individuals to the accessible restrooms which are located on the second and third floors. Such

signage is inexpensive and would be helpful and informative to those arriving or utilizing the conference room on this floor.

Hallways

The hallways are wide and easily maneuverable. There is, however, a slight bump or rise in the hallway on the second floor, by the law library – a sort of a mini ramp – connecting two hallways. The hallway was narrower at this juncture.

A drinking fountain was at an accessible level and functional.



Elevators

There is one elevator in the courthouse. It easily accommodates an individual using a wheelchair, walker or scooter. The buttons are at a low level and Braille signs were evident.

Library

The tight quarters of the law library, with its myriad of bookcases, a small table and a couple chairs, was hard to maneuver for an able-bodied individual. One could conduct legal research on the CD Roms that were made available at a computer terminal. This room is not accessible to a person using a wheelchair and there is no other available space within the courthouse that could house the library.



Courtroom

This turn-of-the-century courtroom is impressive and elegant. The room is well lit. Chairs around the defense and plaintiff's tables are on casters and easily moveable. Chairs in the jury box can also be removed to accommodate a person using a wheelchair, scooter or walker, however, there is no ramp into the box (but a step into the box). In order to maintain its historical significance, some renovations were not done and there are some challenges in this room for individuals with disabilities.

The accessibility team would like to thank Judge Monica Stauffer who remained in the courtroom, after her calendar had concluded for the day, and shared historical information about the facility. She noted that the court staff is sensitive to the needs of any individual with a disability and works to provide special accommodations when such requests are received.



Juror Facilities

As noted previously, few jury trials are held in the courtroom. The team visited a conference room on the lower level/first floor which could be utilized by a jury for deliberations. This room was accessible. The TV did not have closed captioning.

Judge's Chambers

No information is available.

Signage

Other than in the elevator, the team was not aware of any other signs in Braille in the facility.

Suggestion: The addition of Braille signs through the courthouse would provide greater accessibility and would be a relatively inexpensive addition.

CONCLUSION

The Greenlee County Superior Courthouse is a beautiful historic treasure. The courthouse still contains the original chandeliers and mop corners from 1911. Its hilltop location and parking areas will challenge some, but the improved accommodations to the facility during the 1998 restoration are applauded. The team is most appreciative of the time afforded it by the court and county staff and recognizes their commitment to providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities.

