

“Thomas M. Kennedy, Excellence in Accessibility Award”

Background:

Upon the passing of Thomas M. Kennedy, the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders passed a proclamation to initiate an award entitled “Excellence in Accessibility” in his memory. One of eleven children, Tom was a dedicated sixth grade teacher. After being diagnosed with a brain tumor, he worked as a truck driver for Coca Cola.

A relentless advocate for people with disabilities, Tom touched the lives of people throughout Warren County. His persistent efforts led directly to the creation of an Office on Disabilities in Warren County in 1992. Throughout his years of service to Warren County and his work with the Disability Advisory Committee, now known as the Advisory Council on Disabilities and the Transportation Advisory Council (TAC), Thomas Kennedy tirelessly dedicated himself to this cause and to the Warren County community.

The Award:

In April of 2008, Tom was taken from us. To honor his tireless efforts and dedication to equality and access for all, the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders has established the **“Thomas M. Kennedy, Excellence in Accessibility Award.”** By recognizing individuals, businesses, organizations and service groups that are user-friendly and accessible to all and / or have initiated notable efforts and improvements which have facilitated accessibility, the award will help to promote to the entire community the immeasurable impact accessibility affords everyone.

Award Program Administration:

Eligibility:

Warren County’s businesses and other places of public accommodation, organizations, service groups and Warren County residents are eligible for consideration for this award. However, small and privately-owned businesses will be given priority over national chains.

The priorities of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) shall be used in determining eligibility. The ADA’s four basic priorities are:

- 1) Access to the accommodation from the sidewalk(s) or parking area (e.g., ramps, accessible parking, and widened entrance);
- 2) Access to goods or services (e.g. interior ramps, arrangement of racks);
- 3) Access to restrooms; and removal of any other barriers;
- 4) Accessibility, however, is not limited to physical access. Customer service and efforts to remove attitudinal barriers will also be considered. To be truly accessible, businesses and their employees should treat all customers with respect, and provide reasonable accommodations and other assistance as needed.

Promotion of Award:

The Warren County Advisory Council on Disabilities (Council) will publicize the “Thomas M. Kennedy, Excellence in Accessibility Award” in media directed to residents, community groups, organizations, and business owners in Warren County. Media may include the *Warren Reporter*, the radio station WRNJ, the *Senior Voice*, and publicity at the annual Warren County Farmers’ Fair.

Nomination Mechanics:

Nominations will be solicited from the general public.

The nominator will be responsible for completing an award application, which will then be sent to the Council. The Council will review all applications submitted and conduct a physical review of each business, site or organization.

The annual nomination search should be initiated to ensure that all nominations are received by September 1st of each year, with the final selection of the honoree to be announced in October of each year.

Presentation of the Award:

The Thomas M. Kennedy – Excellence in Accessibility Award shall be presented to the annual recipient by the Warren County Board of County Commissioners at a regular meeting in October of each year to intentionally occur during National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

In addition, the awardee will also receive a window display logo, designed and presented by the Council, identifying their organization as one that is accessible to all.

If, for whatever, reason, the presentation cannot be made at an October meeting of the Warren County Board of County Commissioners, the Council shall hold a presentation and reception (with refreshments) at the Council’s regular meeting in October of that year.

The name of the award recipient shall be placed on the Thomas M. Kennedy – Excellence in Accessibility plaque hanging in the Wayne Dumont, Jr., Administration Building in Belvidere, NJ.