

**State Bar of Arizona Committee on Persons with Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Gila County Courthouse
Arizona Superior Court in Gila County
Globe, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Gila County Courthouse, 1400 E. Ash, Globe, AZ 85501

Date: May 7, 2004

Team: Emily Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona); Colleen McManus (State Bar of Arizona); Sally Simmons (Lewis and Roca LLP).

Court Personnel: Bob Hickman, the director of facilities, escorted us. Helping to arrange the visit were Emma Yeoman, Judge Duber's JAA, and Gail Curry, Judge Cahill's JAA, and Debbie Cameron from the facilities office.



Overview

Located in Globe, this is one of two courthouses in Gila County. The other courthouse for the County is in Payson. A justice court and a municipal court for both Globe and Miami also are located in the building we visited. The building was built in the 1970s before the Americans with Disabilities Act became law. We had hoped to have a member of the public who uses a mobility device join us. However, he was unable to do so because of poor health.

Parking

There is ample parking for the persons with disabilities at the back entrance, and this parking is located next to the entrance with a ramp. There are also two accessible spaces in the front of the building.



Entrances and Exits

The major entrance for persons with disabilities is in the back. It has a good ramp leading to it and the parking is located next to the ramp. There are signs outside the front and back of the building indicating that the doors to the inside have push buttons. These buttons were round, rather than square, so there is no chance of snagging clothing on them. In addition, the doors are slow to close, which provides for safety.



Suggestion: The one drawback was the ramp leading to the front entrance. As noted by Mr. Hickman, it is not easily negotiable. It would be helpful to post a sign at the bottom of this ramp to steer individuals with disabilities to the back entrance. In addition, it would be helpful to post a sign at the entrance to the parking lot directing individuals with disabilities to the back parking lot and entrance.



Security/Emergency Evacuation

There is no screening at entrances and exits to the Courthouse. Mr. Hickman advised us that they are working on an emergency plan. They now designate a buddy and a backup for anyone they know who may need assistance. That buddy is to get the person who needs assistance into a safe place in a stairwell at a set location and to stay with them until the fire department can reach them.

Information Center

There is a counter where people can request assistance in the lobby inside the front entrance. The counter is at an appropriate height.

Suggestion: There is no sign posted so that persons with disabilities who need assistance can request such assistance. This information could easily be incorporated into the signs they have posted on and beside the Receptionist's Window (i.e., "The Gila County Courthouse

provides accommodation to individuals with disabilities. Those with disabilities who require assistance should speak with the receptionist.”)

Court Administration

The counter in the justice court clerk’s office is high. Mr. Hickman suggested that the counter for one window could be lowered when the budget permits such a modification. Counters to the clerk's office were accessible.



There is a ramp leading to the court reporter's offices.



There is a conference room for use by court personnel which is fully accessible. It also can be used as a break room or lounge. Counters and cooking facilities appeared accessible.

Restrooms

The second floor restrooms, while not fully accessible, have been improved to accommodate some individuals with disabilities. A portion of the counter and a sink have been lowered to better accommodate persons using a wheelchair. Soap dispensers and paper towels are also within easy reach. Each has a larger stall, which accommodates a person using a wheelchair, scooter or walker.



Suggestions: Since fully accessible restrooms are located on the first floor, we recommend that signs be posted on or near the second floor bathroom doors to direct those needing fully accessible restrooms to those on the first floor.

Hallways and Lobbies

Almost all hallways were wide and would be very easy to negotiate, even for an individual using a wheelchair. The telephones are at a good height and have TTY capacity. However, the phone on the first floor is located between two vending machines. At least one vending machine could be moved a foot or two and allow easier access to the phone.

Drinking fountains were at accessible heights. Even the fire extinguisher was located at an accessible height.

There was plenty of seating in the hallways and lobby for those who might need to rest. Door handles were pull handles, but the doors were not too heavy to be an impediment.



Elevators

The front elevator panel buttons inside the public elevator have Braille; however, the buttons to call the elevator do not. This would be an easy and inexpensive accommodation to make. The back elevator is being remodeled. Access cards can now be given to those who need them to allow them to get to the third floor where the courtrooms are located. For a person with vision challenges, there are audible “dings” that indicate arrival at a floor.

Library

The library is being renovated. A computer which will be accessible when the renovations are completed.

Courtrooms

There are two main courtrooms. The smaller courtroom is very well situated for persons with disabilities. The front row of the jury box is accessible as are counsel tables and the witness chair. The actual chairs used by counsel and jurors have arms which can move up to accommodate larger people. These chairs also have exceptional lumbar support. Use of this type of chair in all courtrooms (in Gila County or elsewhere) would be helpful. There is access for persons using a wheelchair to sit in the audience. The door to the court room is light weight and easy to push open.



There is access through the court administrator's office to a small hearing room. We were advised that an attorney who uses a wheelchair who had used the facilities could maneuver through the court administrator's office to the hearing room.



The hearing room had moveable chairs for the witnesses and counsel. However, the room was small.

If someone needs sign interpreters, they are provided. Head sets are available for persons who are hearing challenged.

Juror Facilities

The jury rooms are accessible and have chairs which can be removed so those in wheelchairs can sit at the table. The bathrooms are not easily accessible. Mr. Hickman suggested that he might create one unisex bathroom in each jury room out of the existing separate facilities for men and women, thus creating a bathroom that would be accessible for those who are mobility impaired.

Counters in the jury rooms are accessible.

Each of the jury rooms has its own air conditioning system. This allows the temperature to be regulated when the room is full of people. This was not done as an item of accommodation, but the end result is that it is a benefit to those with health problems that affect their internal thermostats, such as some people who are paralyzed or who have certain autoimmune diseases.

Chambers

The judges' chambers were ample and for the most part accessible. However, if there was a judge who used a wheelchair, the entrance to the courtroom from chambers would need to be modified as there is a step up to the bench.

General Observations

There was a great awareness of disability and accommodation issues by court personnel to whom we spoke. Mr. Hickman demonstrated a real sensitivity to accessibility issues as he discussed features of the facility. Gila County personnel are also thinking proactively from an ADA standpoint as they plan to remodel old bathrooms to bring these spaces into compliance and to provide even more accessible areas for employees, visitors and the public. Mr. Hickman's willingness to make whatever accommodation could be made for a

lawyer or a judge who has a mobility disability was apparent. Examples of this willingness included providing an elevator access card to attorneys with disabilities and re-designing space so as to allow a judge with a disability the opportunity to rise to the level of the bench in the courtrooms. As evidenced during our tour, the mindset of the staff with regard to the needs of individuals with disabilities is very commendable.

The site visit team was very favorably impressed with the efforts the Gila County Courthouse personnel have made and plan to make in the future to ensure that their courthouse is a welcoming and accessible facility for persons with disabilities. We also appreciated their graciousness and welcome to us.

