



**United Spinal
Association**

United Spinal Association Annual Report



July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

If I were asked to characterize my tenure so far at United Spinal Association, which began in November 2020, I would say that it has been about charting a clear and courageous course in the unknown. Now 76 years old, we have a formidable history and a battle-tested grassroots leadership on which we can rely for practical lessons from the past, as we bring the fight for disability rights firmly into the future.

This year, we debuted the StrongWheeled Together Award, which was the apex of a year-long campaign that paid tribute to the power of community and the individual stories behind our collective fight for equality and independence. We recognized a new generation of leaders across a variety of disciplines, creating a unique platform for people with disabilities to demonstrate our undeniable talent and specific experiences. It's all part of our efforts to move the disability experience from the margins to the center of discourse around culture, business and politics, based on authentic voices from the grassroots. It's only if we find a way to speak loudly and confidently for ourselves in the public sphere that we can upend historic biases and stigmas directed at people with disabilities. StrongWheeled Together was our contribution towards that aim—showcasing the new leaders that will carry on our movement's decades-long civil rights work well into the 21st century.

When we launched our Tech Access Initiative, we aimed high, but outer space was not part of our objectives, per se. However, the hard and intentional work we have put into cultivating relationships with our partners in tech has come to fruition in the most magical way. This winter, I had the privilege of accompanying one of our leading members, Rhonel Cinous, as a representative of United Spinal to the Artemis mission. Participating in a mission to the moon has set a new bar for our work, to be sure, but the bar was already raised high thanks to our incredible members in the Tech Access Group and our exemplary corporate partners in the Tech Access Council. Technology is already bringing so many dreams to life thanks to rapid innovation—and TAI is a model for how the disability community can partner with companies to make our dreams of independent living come to life, and to show the world that universal design is truly a win-win proposition. Tech Access is at the heart of our future-minded orientation.

Then, there is the future of United Spinal as a whole. I want to acknowledge the heroic amounts of work that were put into our Strategic Planning Process this year, which laid the groundwork for our 2023-2028 Business Plan. The amount of ambition on display – rooted in who we are and who we can become – inspires me. With this plan in place, we hope to roll forward and impact the lives of the 5.5 million wheelchair users in this country like never before.

I want to close by saying how proud I am to be leading this organization. I hope to have made my own 21st century contribution to the organization as a leader by bringing in insights from my years of experience in the private sector with modern management techniques. We are entering the new year and a new era more efficient and effective than ever. I am certain that we are poised to do great things—and I hope that you appreciate this record of our recent accomplishments.

Regards,



Vincenzo



OUR MISSION

United Spinal Association is a national 501(c) (3) nonprofit membership organization dedicated to empowering and advocating for people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) and all wheelchair users, to discover greater independence and quality of life.

OUR REACH

United Spinal has access to over 100,000 wheelchair users, with over 60,000 members across 48 chapters, 200 support groups, and 100+ rehabs and hospital partners nationwide—including 10 distinguished Spinal Cord Injury Model System Centers that support innovative projects and research in the field of SCI.

This year, we have touched over 1.8 million lives impacted by disability. Our expansive reach to wheelchair consumers, their families and caregivers, clinicians and disability stakeholders, through our national Spinal Network empowers individuals with disabilities to achieve their highest potential in all facets of life.

We are the leading national organization directly serving and advocating for people with SCI/D, all wheelchair users and their loved ones, providing free resources, one-on-one guidance, comprehensive programs and services, quality of life grants, and peer support.

We are united in our belief that people with disabilities have the right to equal opportunities in all facets of society.

Since 1946, United Spinal has worked to overcome the stigma of disability and remove physical barriers to inclusion so that people with SCI/D can pursue their goals.

We support people with SCI/D and all wheelchair users throughout their lifespan by:

- Advocating for enforcement and enhancement of disability rights, including access to healthcare, mobility equipment, public transportation, rehabilitation, community services and support, and the built environment
- Empowering our members, their loved ones, care providers and professionals with valuable resources, including information on employment, affordable housing, transportation, health care, home- and community-based

independent living, education, peer support, technology, and leisure and recreation

- Ensuring people with SCI/D and all wheelchair users can maintain the highest levels of independence, health, and personal fulfillment
- Promoting civic participation and self-advocacy

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

United Spinal Association recognizes that we cannot fulfill our mission of enhancing the quality of life of all people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) without acknowledging differences in our community. A proactive commitment to diversity and inclusion guides how we compose our workforce and board, develop grassroots leadership, and select our partners in the movement for people with disabilities. We prioritize partnership with corporations and agencies that share this broad commitment to inclusion. Without ensuring that these needs are met, we cannot build a truly representative membership organization.

We strive to represent the interests of all people living with SCI/D, including racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities, women, and LGBTQIA. We tailor our programs, advocacy, publications, and social support work to make the voices of the geographically underrepresented and socioeconomically disadvantaged members of the disability community heard everywhere from Capitol Hill to the marketplace.

The dynamic lives of our members, based across the United States, are the basis of our understanding of how these different identities intersect with the experience of paralysis. We know that we cannot move both our organization and our movement forward without a clearly articulated commitment to diversity.

OUR IMPACT

United Spinal is committed to advocating for greater civil rights and independence for people with disabilities, including expanding education and employment, improving enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ensuring adequate access to public transportation and taxi services, and amending Medicare rules that restrict many individuals to their homes and nursing facilities.

Membership in United Spinal is free and open to all individuals with SCI/D.



Renewed and Rejuvenated United Spinal is On a Roll:

It's been an exciting year for United Spinal Association as we welcomed our new CEO, Vincenzo Piscopo. James Weisman retired as CEO and remained our general counsel. Piscopo, a paraplegic, brings substantial experience from the corporate sector as he served in many high-level positions with Coca-Cola. Under Piscopo's leadership, United Spinal kicked off a reorganization process that will finish in the next fiscal year.

We also kicked off a year-long anniversary celebration as United Spinal turned 75! That's a fantastic milestone for a nonprofit. We began as Eastern Paralyzed Veterans in 1948 and, throughout the years, have been major players in most significant laws and policies that benefit all people with disabilities, especially those with paralysis. Our decades of accomplishments include curb cuts, bus lifts, the Americans with Disabilities Act, accessible taxis, better access to comprehensive durable medical equipment, and much more.

"We have every reason to be proud of all we have accomplished and to celebrate our victories," said Piscopo about our landmark anniversary. "But only if we acknowledge that we are not where we need to be. There is still a lot of work to be done."

Also, United Spinal received accreditation from the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance this year. This accreditation signifies that United Spinal deserves donor trust as a well-run nonprofit organization.

"The public can be assured that every charity evaluation is completed with careful, objective analysis of charity information," said Art Taylor, president and CEO of the BBB Wise Giving Alliance, "By achieving accreditation,

United Spinal Association has earned public trust having demonstrated its commitment to sound governance, transparency and achieving its mission."

Renewed, rejuvenated and refocused on the future, United Spinal Association is ready to lead the disability community through the next 75 years — and beyond.

United followed up its successful anniversary year campaign with its #Strongwheeled Together campaign. This initiative invites members and all wheelchair users to explore how living with a disability can foster resilience, community, and inner strength.

Following are highlights from selected programs:

Big Changes at the Resource Center

In June, United Spinal Association said goodbye to our longtime Resource Center Director Bill Fertig, who has retired. Although Fertig is missed, we are excited to welcome our new Director of Community Supports Matthew Castelluccio. Castelluccio, a quadriplegic, comes to us with a strong background in running a United Spinal chapter, directing a center for independent living and conducting outreach in a spinal cord rehab program.

"The journey of recovery can be challenging but does not need to be traveled alone. United Spinal Association is a community of people with lived disability experience that can support you along the way," says Castelluccio. "With the help of the team at United Spinal Association, many questions can be answered, and concerns can be addressed about living with a disability."

The Resource Center's dedicated staff field roughly 30,000 inquiries yearly from people with disabilities in the United States and abroad. They do not give up until each caller receives the best possible information, resources, and outcomes. Castelluccio plans to strengthen and expand United's partnership with its hospital members and other key community organizations.

Related to the Resource Center changes, United Spinal is focusing on expanding its digital footprint, tightening its online resources and creating a seamless experience for visitors to its website, Unitedspinal.org. Toward this goal, Josie Byzek became United's first Director of Digital Experience and Content in May.

Byzek transitioned from her role as executive editor of United's membership magazine, *New Mobility*, to this new position. She looks forward to collaborating with United's program staff to better position their work on United's digital platforms. "I'm especially excited to find new ways to share the life-changing work of my peers at United Spinal," she says. "Our programs collectively connect wheelchair users and their families to community services, provide peer support, assist in employment searches, ensure strong laws and policies, and even advise Big Tech on how to make the future accessible."

The Vibrant and Diverse Offerings of our Peer Support Program

In partnership with our extensive chapter and hospital member network, United Spinal Association offers over 100 peer support groups that meet in person, virtually or both throughout the United States. We run over 16 virtual peer support groups directly, including Rolling with Pride, the first support group for LGBTQ+ people with disabilities offered by a national disability organization.

Since every demographic includes wheelchair users and their family members, United offers many diverse support groups. In addition to Rolling with Pride, these include Spanish Speaking, Caregivers, Women's Group, Men's Group, Newly Injured Group, Family and Friend's Groups, SCI Nutrition Group, Significant Others Group and Gun Violence Survivors.

One-on-one mentoring is an essential part of peer support, which is why United Spinal conducts between six and 10 peer mentoring trainings per year, as requested by our chapters and peer support groups.

"We also created a new interactive online training component to complement an engaging and informative virtual session," says Peer Support Director Lindsey Elliott, MSW. "The goal of our program is to ensure wheelchair users across the country are connected to the best resources to maintain independent and healthy active lives."

Elliott collaborated with Greater Boston United Spinal chapter member Michaela Devins to create Mental Health Mondays. This initiative ties into the #Strongwheeled Together campaign by developing and disseminating content that provides coping resources and breaks down mental health stigma. It is an example of innovative, authentic peer support that United Spinal, with the participation of its members, provides better than anyone else. Combined with traditional approaches like peer mentoring and support groups, offered live and virtually, this initiative is part of United's uniquely robust peer program.

Our Advocacy and Policy Department is Painting America Orange



Our Advocacy and Policy department created the [Grassroots Advocacy Network](#) to organize the entire United States of America around our agenda of improving the lives of people with SCI/D and all wheelchair users. The centerpiece of this initiative is a map of the United States with every legislative district with a registered GAN advocate colored in orange.

The goal is for each of our nation's legislative districts to have at least one registered advocate. By June 2022, United Spinal currently has 1,304 registered advocates in 398 Congressional districts across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. There are 435 legislative districts in our nation.

This tremendous accomplishment of having over 1,000 advocates educating and informing their U.S. Representatives and Senators on issues affecting our membership is just one part of United's multi-pronged advocacy efforts. Our Government Relations and Advocacy Policy teams hold monthly live streams, disseminate a quarterly newsletter, and run social media platforms. And they bring hundreds of wheelchair users to our nation's capital every June for our signature advocacy event, Roll on Capitol Hill.

Our approach works. In April, the sustained efforts of our United Spinal advocates across the country helped convince Congress to approve a \$2 million budget increase to fund additional Spinal Cord Injury model centers and increased funds for the whole model systems program. This increase directly improved the lives of people sustaining spinal cord injuries in Alabama, Massachusetts, Michigan and Texas as these rehab hospitals are once more part of the SCI Model Systems Program:

[University of Alabama at Birmingham Spinal Cord Injury Model System \(UAB\)](#)

[Spaulding New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center \(Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital\)](#)

[Michigan Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems \(University of Michigan – Ann Arbor\)](#)

[Texas Model Spinal Cord Injury System \(Memorial Hermann Health System\)](#)

Steve Lieberman, United Spinal's director of advocacy and policy, says that the funding increase was a significant win, but our work continues. "Back in the early 2000s, there were around 200,000 people with spinal cord injuries in the U.S., and now there are more than 300,000," says Lieberman. "But funding for model systems has stayed stagnant — it hasn't kept up with inflation or with the increased number of people with SCI. In fact, there are whole regions of the country, like the Pacific Northwest, that lack a single SCI model center."



Roll on Capitol Hill 2022

Finally, the Covid pandemic waned enough for our Roll on Capitol Hill event to bring advocates back to Washington, D.C., in person for our first-ever hybrid Roll. Some advocates remained home and participated virtually, and some legislators met with advocates at virtual stations our staff set up for that purpose. Also, over 200 came in person to trek up to the Capitol Building and meet their legislators in person.

Our staff's flexibility and resilience allowed for all these options. The event successfully advocated for a slate of issues that included supporting more funding for the SCI Model Systems, advocating for automobile grants for disabled veterans, and pushing for the modernization of outdated regulations that prevent wheelchair users from accessing equipment that is right for them.

"Thank you for letting me know my voice matters," says Davita Carter, a United Spinal member from Illinois who attended ROCH 2022. "This is such a cool organization, and I hope this is just the first of many years that I can be a part of Roll on Capitol Hill. I'm excited!"

Ready to Roll Initiative for Emergency Preparedness

Thanks to generous grants from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, United Spinal Association can provide our members with grants to help them rebuild their lives after a natural disaster. We have also distributed thousands of Ready to Roll kits that include essential, life-saving items like a collapsible water bottle, a small toolkit, a plastic poncho, a flashlight that attaches to a wheelchair and first-aid supplies.

Some of the people we have helped this year include Terrell Patterson and the Young family, whose teenage daughter, Maddie, is a wheelchair user. All of them were forced to leave their homes because of Hurricane Ida. The Youngs were unable to return to their homes.

"Because our house was destroyed, we decided to move in with our parents," says April Young, Maddie's mother. "With the help of United Spinal, we were able to get Maddie what she needed, and that was an accessible shower. That was the first breath of fresh air that I could have.

"It was so important to me because I was able to take a shower the way I, personally, could," adds Maddie. United also helped the Youngs obtain a ramp.

Wheelchair user Patterson rode Hurricane Ida out with his girlfriend and daughter. "The hurricane destroyed my home. It ripped off my siding, damaged my floors, and messed my roof up. I had to get repairs done to my ramp and refurnish the whole trailer," says Patterson. As a wheelchair user, he says it was even hard getting close to his home, let alone inspecting the damage inside. "I felt like I wasn't helping enough, either mentally or physically," he says.

His therapist suggested he call United Spinal for help, but he didn't believe United could help with that much damage, so he didn't call right away. When he did contact United, "they told me they're going to take care of the whole renovation. If it weren't for United Spinal, I'd still probably be trying to get the repairs."

United Spinal Association Provides Much, Much More

United Spinal offers many more programs than just the few we highlighted here.

Our [TechAccess Initiative](#) fosters an exchange between our membership and technology companies to ensure corporate culture, products, and services embrace wheelchair users and all people with mobility disabilities. This way, new products and technology are designed to be used by everyone, including wheelchair users, from inception to market.

Our membership magazine, [New Mobility](#), is seen by 98,000 people every

month. It covers lifestyle issues from the perspective of wheelchair users and is usually the first place to hear about a new product, service or wheelchair-using media personality.

[Pathways to Employment](#) runs hands-on webinars and resource groups for wheelchair users with employment goals. We even offer a job portal for our members and employers to find each other. Our focus is on removing the barriers between the prospective employee with a disability and potential employers.

[VetsFirst](#) assists disabled veterans and their eligible family members in obtaining the benefits they're entitled to, deserve and need. We also advocate for veterans with disabilities to ensure they achieve the highest level of independence and quality of life.

[Accessibility Services](#) is all about making our built environment accessible. Its team of certified accessibility specialists, plan examiners, attorneys, architects, and code enforcement officials are skilled in applying state and federal accessibility requirements, including the 2010 ADA Standards, the Fair Housing Act Accessibility Guidelines, UFAS, and state/local accessibility requirements to your project.





United Spinal Association is the largest disability-led non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for 5.5 M wheelchair users in the U.S. including individuals living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), and veterans, providing support and information to loved ones and care providers. United Spinal has over 75 years of advocacy experience educating, and empowering wheelchair users impacted by paralyzing conditions and mobility disabilities to achieve and maintain the highest levels of independence, health and personal fulfillment. United Spinal has over 60,000 members, over 45 chapters, close to 200 support groups and more than 100 rehabilitation facilities and hospital partners nationwide. United Spinal Association is also a VA-recognized veterans service organization (VSO) serving veterans with disabilities of all kinds.

VETSFIRST*

VetsFirst is a leader in advocacy for veterans with disabilities, ensuring they achieve the highest level of independence and quality of life. The program connects with thousands of veterans and actively serving military personnel annually.

NATIONAL CHAPTER NETWORK

United Spinal Chapters (50+) are self-dependent organizations support the SCI/D community by promoting health and well-being, inclusion and independence, organizing local events and projects, advocating for rights and accessibility, and offering resources and support.

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP MEETING*

This annual meeting brings together our national leadership to discuss the critical needs within the SCI/D community so we can provide our chapters with tools to effectively serve our members.

ADVOCACY & POLICY NETWORK

We are actively engaged in advocating for policies that benefit paralyzed Americans and all people with disabilities. Our priorities focus on healthcare, community integration, employment, disability benefits and disability rights.

ROLL ON CAPITOL HILL*

Our annual legislative advocacy event brings wheelchair users from across the country to Washington, DC to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the policy debate, and addresses legislative and regulatory issues that impact our members.

RESOURCE CENTER*

Our Spinal Cord Resource Center connects people with personal guidance and state and local resources to effectively regain their quality of life and independence after diagnosis of a spinal cord injury or disorder.

PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT*

We support the pursuit of new career opportunities for people with disabilities and partner with employers to place people with SCI/D in jobs and provide trained peer mentors, resources, and professional support to facilitate return to work.

FREE MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

We have over 75 years of experience empowering people with SCI/D to achieve the highest levels of independence, health and personal fulfillment.

PEER MENTORING/SUPPORT GROUPS

We provide peer to peer support for individuals, friends, caregivers and family members through a national network of peer support groups and individual mentor/peer relationships

NEW MOBILITY

United Spinal's monthly membership magazine which provides the latest information and resources on active living for wheelchair users.

HOSPITAL NETWORK

Our Affiliate Hospital Members provide the full scope of clinical and rehabilitative services with an emphasis on spinal cord injury care.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/READY TO ROLL*

We assist the SCI/D community, caregivers, professionals and municipalities to prepare for natural or human-caused disasters through advanced planning, education, awareness raising and distribution of Ready to Roll kits.

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

We ensure that the built environment is accessible to all people with disabilities and provide a team of certified accessibility specialists and architects to train design professionals, review plans and complete inspections nationwide.

UNITED ON WHEELS PODCAST

We produce a wheelchair lifestyle podcast addressing all the things that wheelchair users care about and candid discussions ranging from dating to traveling with a disability.

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE CAMPAIGN

This national campaign was created to erase public misconceptions about wheelchair users and effectively interact with someone with a disability for the first time.

TECH ACCESS INITIATIVE*

This program ensures accessible tech innovation and thought leadership with tech industry stakeholders representing the needs of consumers with mobility disabilities and wheelchair users. It's Tech Access Group of quad and paraplegic influencers is available for focus groups and market research.

For more information about United Spinal's programs and services,
visit www.unitedspinal.org, call 800-404-2898 or email askus@unitedspinal.org.



**Vincenzo Piscopo,
President & CEO – Georgia**

Vincenzo Piscopo began his tenure as United Spinal's president and CEO on November 16, 2020 replacing James Weisman, who retired after 40 years of service to the disability community as an advocate for disability rights and accessible transportation. Piscopo, a wheelchair-user who was paralyzed from a herniated disk in 2010, previously worked at The Coca-Cola Company for 25 years in a variety of strategic roles both in the US and internationally. In his most recent position as the Community and Stakeholder Relations Director at The Coca-Cola Company, Piscopo managed and cultivated company relationships with disability, veteran and Hispanic organizations and advocates for these communities. Piscopo has based much of his work on the belief that people with disabilities are assets for corporations because of their resilience, perseverance, and creative problem-solving skills. Piscopo is also the founder and board member of the Wheels of Happiness Foundation which helps people with motor disabilities in disadvantaged areas of the world, and a member of the board of directors of the organizations Respectability and Friends of the Disabled Adults and Children. Born in Venezuela of Italian immigrants, Piscopo currently resides with his wife and four children in Atlanta, Georgia. He has a bachelor's degree in economics, an MBA from Carnegie Mellon University, and a Masters in Creativity from Buffalo State College.



**Tom Aiello, Chairman of the Board & President
of March Marketing, LLC.—Illinois**

Tom Aiello is president of March Marketing, LLC. He is a West Point graduate and Army veteran living with spinal cord injury (SCI) from Wheaton, Illinois. He is currently president and founder of March Marketing, LLC., a leading agency specializing exclusively in strategy, consulting, marketing, recruiting, public relations, social media, and word-of-mouth communications for products and services targeting military and veteran families. After graduating from West Point, Tom served in the 1st Cavalry Division with deployments to Kuwait, Panama, and Korea. Tom received his Master's in business administration from the Kellogg Business School. His prior positions include division vice president of Marketing at Sears Holdings; general manager and vice president of Marketing at Monster Worldwide and vice president, ac-

count director at Leo Burnett Advertising. Throughout his career, he has assisted employers in hiring over 50,000 veterans and raised \$118 million for community programs improving the quality of life for more than 110,000 military and veteran families. Tom was recognized by Kellogg Business School as a 2016 Young Social Impact Scholar for his social impact to better the lives of the military and veteran community.



**Joshua Basile, Board Secretary & Trial Attorney at
Jack H Olender & Associates—Maryland**

Joshua Basile is a trial attorney with the preeminent law firm of Jack H Olender & Associates in Washington DC. The law firm fights for the injured with a concentration on medical malpractice and catastrophic injury cases. In 2004, Basile's life was literally flipped upside down. While on a family vacation in Delaware, he was slammed headfirst into the ocean floor by a wave. His paralysis rendered him a C4-5 quadriplegic but it did not stop him from finding his voice and wheeling after his goals. Basile's positive attitude and desire to help others motivated him to form the Determined2heal Foundation. For over 10 years, he has fought to simplify the difficult transition into life with paralysis for the newly injured. He went on to create the world's largest paralysis video mentoring network — opens in a new window www.SPINALpedia.com. Basile's paralysis limited what he could do physically but mentally the sky was the limit. He went on to strengthen his mind and voice by graduating cum laude from the University of Maryland in communication. Three years later, Basile graduated magna cum laude from law school, and soon after passed the Maryland and District of Columbia bars. In his free time, Basile takes those in the spinal cord injury community on rehabilitative adventures. He invented a sport called Slingshot Golf which allows anyone with a physical limitation to play golf competitively. He received two patents for his putting device called The Pendulum Putter. His other rehabilitative adventures include skiing, sailing, bowling, fishing, gliding and indoor skydiving. In May 2016, he brought a quadriplegic and paraplegic on a sailing adventure from Key West to Cuba and back over eight days. He believes that with the right attitude and adventure spirit most anything is possible. In order to truly experience the world, one must not be afraid to get their wheels a little dirty. No matter the surface — land, air or sea — the world can and should be experienced by all. Life is too short not to dream big!



**Carmen Jones, Vice Chair & CEO/President of
Solutions Marketing Group—Georgia**

Carmen has been an advocate within the disability community for more than 25 years. She is CEO/President of the Solutions Marketing Group, a disability marketing agency. Living with spinal cord injury since her junior year of college, Carmen uses her experience as a wheelchair user to lead the development of strate-

gies for companies and government agencies to employ, market to and provide customer services to the Nation's 56M people with disabilities. Carmen previously served as an appointee of President Barack Obama from 2009 to 2016 at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In that capacity she served as a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Secretary and developed new market opportunities for minority farmers in the rural south. Most recently, she served as the Director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. She was a part of the Board of Directors for the National Spinal Cord Injury Association from 1998 to 2006; and then joined the United Spinal Board in 2010.



**Len Zandrow, Partner,
Brister & Zandrow—Massachusetts**

Len has been involved with the disability community for 16 years. Len was the General Counsel of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association (NSCIA) from 1995 until its merger with United Spinal Association in 2011. He is a member of the NSCIA's Greater Boston Chapter. In 2001, he received the James E. Smittkamp award for outstanding service to NSCIA. Len has been an attorney in civil litigation since graduating from Boston College Law School in 1981. Previously, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Journalism from Northwestern University. Before beginning private practice, Len was the Chief Law Clerk to the Justices of the Massachusetts Superior Court. He is one of the founding partners of Brister & Zandrow, LLP, a personal injury law firm with offices in Boston and Plymouth, Massachusetts. Len also currently serves as the Executive Director of the Justice Bridge Legal Center, a non-profit law incubator of the University of Massachusetts School of Law, with offices in Boston and New Bedford, Massachusetts. Len has been involved in over 40 reported decisions in the Massachusetts and Federal courts including the United States Supreme Court, where he represented the NSCIA twice as an amicus curiae. He has held a variety of volunteer positions in bar associations and civic, service and religious organizations, and he has been recognized in the International Who's Who of Professionals, Marquis Who's Who in American Law, Who's Who of Emerging Leaders in America, and Strathmore's Who's Who.



**Theresa Berner, Rehabilitation Clinical
Manager, OSU Wexner Medical—Ohio**

Theresa Berner, MOT, OTR/L, ATP is an occupational therapist and Rehabilitation Clinical Manager at the OSU Wexner Medical. She has over 25 years' experience in seating and positioning and adult rehabilitation. Theresa has been certified by RESNA as an Assistive Technology Professional (ATP). She is responsible for Assistive Technology center and is a clinical instructor at the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at OSU where she is involved in teaching both in the OT and PT programs.

Theresa is a member of the Clinician Task Force, AOTA, RESNA and Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals. Theresa has participated in presentations at the International Seating Symposiums, Congress on Spinal Cord Injury Medicine, The Academy of PM&R, American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA), RESNA and Posture and Mobility Group in Glasgow Scotland. Theresa received the 2016 Academy of Spinal Cord Injury TLC Distinguished Clinical Award and the 2017 OSU Medical Center Values in Action Award. Theresa has served on multiple professional boards including The Ohio OT Association and The Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals.



**Darren Brehm,
Senior Director, Direct Materials Procurement,
Dairy Farmers of America—Missouri**

Darren currently works as Senior Director of Direct Materials Procurement with Dairy Farmers of America. In that capacity, he successfully manages all commodity, ingredients, packaging, and co-manufacturing spend to drive value for the 14,000 member farmer-owners. Prior to working at DFA, Brehm led the North America Ingredients Procurement Team for KraftHeinz, and was also an Engagement Manager with McKinsey and Company. Brehm received his Masters of Business Administration from Harvard Business School in 2007, graduating in top 10 percent of his class. In 2002, he received his Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from San Diego State University. Brehm, a C4-5 quadriplegic who uses a power wheelchair, also served as peer ambassador at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago to help individuals with spinal cord injuries transition back into their communities.



**David Capozzi, Former Executive Director of
the U.S. Access Board—Maryland**

David M. Capozzi, from Gaithersburg, MD, was the Executive Director of the U.S. Access Board, the only Federal agency whose primary mission is accessibility for people with disabilities. He recently retired in June. Capozzi, a wheelchair user since 1977, has over 35 years of experience directing programs focused on national accessibility policies in the Federal and non-profit sectors. He was a member of a nine-person legal team that helped craft sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. While at the Access Board, Capozzi managed complex rulemakings, regulatory assessments, contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. He was also responsible for the Access Board's Architectural Barriers Act enforcement program. Capozzi holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from the University of Buffalo and a Law Degree from the University at Buffalo School of Law.



Ronald Drach,
Drach Consulting, LLC.—Maryland

Ronald is a results-oriented leader with a strong record of directing organizations in the delivery of benefits and employment to service members and veterans with service-connected disabilities. Ronald specializes in helping veterans to reintegrate into their family and community

after sustaining combat and other injuries or illnesses in the line of duty to their country. He also has strong connections to support services and other resources necessary to enhance the quality of life of the severely injured and extensive experience working in all programs and services for people with disabilities.



Kimberly Hill, Executive Director of the Louisiana Chapter of United Spinal and the Brain Injury Association of Louisiana—Louisiana

Kimberly Hill, MS, CTRS, CCT, brings a wealth of professional and personal experiences to her current position as the Executive Director of the Louisiana Chapter of United Spinal Association and the Brain Injury Association of Louisiana.

Currently, she serves as the South-Central Regional Coordinator for United Spinal Association as well as the Louisiana Chapter Leader. She represents Louisiana as the state Affiliate Leader for the Brain Injury Association of America where she also sits on the Chapter Leaders' Education committee. Kimberly's passion with her numerous roles and job duties stem from a deeper understanding and personal perspective as a result of being a mother of a child who sustained and recovered from a c5-c6 spinal cord injury and as a relative to a family member who sustained a traumatic brain injury. Drawing from these experiences, Kimberly feels compelled to share hope, compassion, and understanding with others who have experienced similar challenging situations in their lives. As a nationally Board-Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist and Certified Cognitive Therapist, Kimberly has over 20 years of experience working in various settings including inpatient, outpatient, and residential neurological rehabilitation. After completing her undergraduate studies at Louisiana State University, Kimberly received her Master of Science degree in Therapeutic Recreation from the University of South Alabama. With her unwavering sense of passion, commitment, and desire to make a difference in the world by helping others, Kimberly and the Louisiana Chapter were awarded United Spinal Association's 2019 Reggie Bennett Outstanding Community Leader Award and the 2019 Award of Excellence for Programs and Services by the Brain Injury Association of America.



Carina Ho,
Accessibility Specialist, Airbnb—California

Carina Ho is a New York native who now resides in Oakland, CA. She is a musical artist who performs around the country under the moniker ONIKHO. Previously, she danced professionally with AXIS Dance Company, a contemporary dance ensemble comprised of dancers both

with and without disabilities. After touring with AXIS for several years, Carina moved to Uruguay as a Fulbright Fellowship recipient to teach dance at the national dance conservatory in Montevideo. She now works at Airbnb as an Accessibility Specialist in addition to continuing her artistic career. She is passionate about creating an accessible and inclusive world for people with disabilities. Photo credit AXIS Dance Company/David DeSilva



Minna Hong, Delta's Disability Advisory Board; Synergies Works Board—Georgia

Minna is a mixed medium artist. She's a jewelry designer, a painter, ceramicist and a food artist. After retirement, she is giving back to the community that has been so generous to her life journey after she was spinal cord injured in a car accident in 1999. She is committed to creating a community where all are welcome at the table: Delta's Disability Advisory Board; Synergies Works Board member/teaching artist; (an organization supporting entrepreneurs with intellectual and physical disabilities); New Mobility Magazine, community partner; One Bread, community partner, food outreach program to end food scarcity in Atlanta. Prior to her recent retirement, she was the Spinal Cord Injury Peer Support Manager at Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia. She was also a Board Member of Disability Resource Group and distribution committee member for Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund, Georgia.

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Andraea LaVant, President, LaVant Consulting, Inc.—Arizona

Andraea LaVant is founder and president of LaVant Consulting, Inc., a strategy and communications firm dedicated to fostering disability-inclusive cultures across all sectors. As a communications consultant and inclusion specialist, Andraea has over a decade of experience

working with programs that support youth and adults with disabilities and other underserved populations. Her professional roles and personal advocacy have presented her with a variety of notable opportunities to share messages and prompt change for people with disabilities across the globe. Andraea's work for non-profit and private sector organiza-

tions have included managing national initiatives that increase and support engagement of people with disabilities in mainstream programs, and coordinating and overseeing multiple federally funded technical assistance and training centers designed to prepare young people with disabilities to transition from school to employment. She is adept at researching, writing, and training on youth development and employer-focused curricula (including briefs, guides and reports). She also has substantial experience developing strategic partnerships and facilitating successful and innovative practices within the disability field, including creating media messaging. Andraea, who lives with a form of muscular dystrophy called spinal muscular atrophy, is a strong advocate for exploring disability from an intersectional lens and offers a unique perspective on the initiatives that she supports.



**Jenny M. Lieberman, PhD, OTR/L, ATP,
Department of Rehabilitation, Mount Sinai
Hospital—New York**

Jenny Lieberman currently leads the wheelchair seating clinic at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, NY and has been a practicing occupational therapist since 1996. Lieberman began her career at RUSK Rehabilitation Center at New

York University where she worked on the rehabilitation unit, assisting in evaluating patients for their wheelchair seating and mobility needs. In 1998, she joined Bellevue Hospital in New York, NY and played an integral role in developing their wheelchair seating and outpatient brain injury programs. Lieberman also has over 20 years of experience advocating for people with spinal cord injury and greater access to complex rehabilitation technology or products designed to meet the medical, physical, and functional needs of people with disabilities. Lieberman holds a Doctoral Degree in Research in Occupational Therapy, from New York University; New York, NY and a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from Sargent College of Allied Health Professions, Boston University; Boston, MA.



**David Mann, Senior Researcher at
Mathematica—Pennsylvania**

David Mann is a senior researcher at Mathematica. His research focuses on programs that provide employment or income support to youth and working age adults with disabilities. Mann has helped evaluate Social Security Administration initiatives that promote employment

for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries, including Ticket to Work, the Benefit Offset National Demonstration (BOND), and the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration (POD). He has also played a key role in several projects examining the outcomes of vocational rehabilitation custom-

ers, including transition age youth with disabilities. For example, Mann is currently leading the impact evaluation of a Rehabilitation Services Administration funded demonstration examining an empirically supported work-based transition model for transition age youth with disabilities. Mann oversees Mathematica's work for the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics, which is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) to produce new knowledge that can improve the well-being of people with disabilities. He was principal investigator in disability employment policy for the Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR), which is improving the accessibility of research evidence for policymakers and stakeholders. Mann publishes in peer-reviewed journals, such as the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Journal of Disability Policy Studies, Demography, and Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Pennsylvania. Mann received a PhD in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania in 2011.



**Chris O'Donoghue, Emmy Winning General
Assignment Reporter--New York**

Chris O'Donoghue was an EMMY Award winning General Assignment Reporter and Investigative Producer for FOX Television's WWOR-TV Channel 9's Ten P.M. daily newscasts. Chris came from his native home of Ireland to the U.S. in 1965 to pursue a career as a professional soccer player. But soon after he arrived in New York, a sudden onset of an undetected spinal condition affected Chris's legs and eventually led to paralysis and the use of a wheelchair by 1976. After earning a Bachelor's Degree in English at CCNY and a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Psychology from NYU in 1981, Chris went on to manage and subsequently run his own rehabilitation consulting business. In addition to his on-air accomplishments, in 1993 Chris received the Henry Steiffel "Against All Odds" award for exceptional positive role modeling for people with disabilities. On December 3, 1998, Chris was the MC for the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons held at Lincoln Center. Chris was appointed in 1996 as Adjunct Professor for the NYU Journalism Department's Graduate and Undergraduate Television Reporting. O'Donoghue resides in Manhattan.



**Christopher Pangilinan, Head of Global Policy,
Public Transportation at Uber—California**

Christopher is a professional transportation engineer. He works to create safe, reliable, and sustainable urban transportation options. He is particularly interested in the use of data and new technologies to reshape today's transportation services. As part of his work, Christopher is

constantly pursuing new ways to harness data to change the way we make decisions from the strategic to operations level, measure performance, engage communities, and tell the story of how urban transportation affects the cities we live in. Christopher was a Transit Engineering Team Leader, Transportation Engineer, and Transit Planner for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency from 2010-2014 where he analyzed MetroCard swipe data of New York City Transit's 6 million daily riders over a 4-year period to understand changes in ridership patterns system wide—specifically along the A and C subway lines. He also managed a team of 12 transportation engineers and planners and coordinated the development, legislation, and community outreach of the Muni Forward initiative. Christopher graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006 with MS in Transportation. In 2004, he earned a BS in Civil Engineering from Portland State University.



Ronnie Raymond, Advocacy for the Disabled-UJA Disability Awareness Task Force, the Jewish Museum, Taxis for All Campaign, Concerts in Motion—New York

During the 1990s, Ronnie—a wheelchair user who lives with multiple sclerosis—was involved in a case against a New York City Cooperative where she lived that revolved around creating a wheelchair accessible entrance. At that time, United Spinal offered to represent her legally. In 1999, she had a hearing at the New York City Human Rights Commission and prevailed. The Co-Op was instructed to build a ramp at the main entrance. Later, Ronnie became involved in United Spinal's Women without Limits program that dealt with issues facing women with disabilities. Ronnie is also on the board of Concerts in Motion, a New York City-based nonprofit organization that reaches out to people who are homebound, veterans, people with disabilities, people who are homeless, and medical patients of all ages. Through United Spinal, Concerts in Motion has been connected with the VA hospitals in New York City and performs for the veterans monthly.



Javier Robles, JD, Director of the Center for Disability Sports, Health and Wellness at Rutgers University—New Jersey

Javier Robles is currently an Adjunct Professor at Rutgers University and past President of Thisabled, LLC, an organization that provides support to persons with disabilities through self-empowerment and perseverance. He is a Juris Doctor graduate of Seton Hall Law School in 1995 and graduated with a double degree in Sociology and Puerto Rican and Caribbean Studies from Rutgers University in 1989. An unfortunate accident at the age of 16 caused Robles to become a C5 quadriplegic, and his doctors told him that he would never regain any movement or strength in his

body, never have children, and become dependent on Social Security for the long term. Rejecting these assumptions and determined to beat the odds, he went on to finish his education and launch a prolific career. Until 2010, he served as the Deputy Director of the NJ Division of Disability Services (DDS), a \$370 million division situated in the New Jersey Department of Human Services and which provides monthly services to over 19,000 people with disabilities. He also worked as the Project Officer for the NJ Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, which sought to change employment outcomes for people with disabilities, and he oversaw the Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP), the NJ Modular Ramp and Low-Riser Step Program, and the Personal Preference Program, and was a member of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on immigration. He is also the Chair of the New Jersey Disabilities Covid-19 Action Committee. Robles was appointed by Gov. Murphy to the Puerto Rico commission and was recently appointed to the United Spinal National Board. He the Vice President of the Latino Action Network of New Jersey (LAN) and was on the board of Canine Companion for Independence Northeast Board for 15 years. Robles has written for numerous publications including, Latinos NJ, ThisAble Nation, New Mobility. One of his poems was recently published in the book, Access Granted. He is currently working on a book of poetry and writing an article on people with disabilities and inclusion. He is a photographer and a collector of glass and vintage negatives from the 1800 and early 1900s. Additionally, he is a beekeeper and Gardner in the Central Jersey region. He lives with his wife, daughter, and service dog in New Jersey.



Reveca Torres, Founder of Backbones—Illinois

Reveca Torres was paralyzed in a car accident at the age of thirteen. After completing degrees in Fashion Design and Theatre Arts, Reveca worked as a costume designer and simultaneously worked with various organizations doing disability work in health/fitness, advocacy, recreation, and peer support. She started a nonprofit called BACKBONES after realizing that years of interaction and friendship with others living with spinal injuries (SCI) had made a significant impact in her life. Reveca wanted to ensure that others, especially those newly injured, had access to resources, information, and the same type of peer support she has had. She is co-director of ReelAbilities Film Festival Chicago and has curated touring photography and art exhibitions that showcase the work of people with disabilities and bring awareness to disability rights. Reveca uses painting, illustration, photography, film, movement, and other media as a form of expression and as a tool for advocacy and social justice.



Renee Tyree, West Regional Pharmacy Director, Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospitals—Arizona

Dr. Tyree brings her personal life experiences as a wheelchair user, passion and determined spirit to the United Spinal team. Dr. Tyree is a native of Wisconsin and has since settled in Arizona

after graduating from the University of Arizona. Dr. Tyree is a practicing pharmacist with more than 20 years of experience in hospital pharmacy management and leadership. In her current position, as West Regional Pharmacy Director for Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospitals, Dr. Tyree combines her pharmacy organizational and leadership skills with her clinical interests in the areas

of physical medicine, spinal cord dysfunction and neurological conditions to create and support successful teams that deliver leading pharmaceutical care to rehabilitation patients. Dr. Tyree is a former elite Paralympic athlete, having competed in three Paralympic Games on three medal winning basketball teams. Since retiring from the sport of basketball, Renée enjoys spending her free time traveling, kayaking, reading and relaxing by the pool.



Keaston White, Attorney-Advisor at Office of the Solicitor the United States Department of Interior—Georgia

Keaston is Attorney-Advisor at Office of the Solicitor the United States Department of Interior. His first love was performing. As a child, he dreamed of becoming an on-screen actor. In particular,

he had a fascination with different voices and speaking styles. Creating different characters and accents to entertain family and friends became one of his favorite pastimes. But on September 11, 2001, one of America's darkest days, Keaston's dreams were shattered when he suffered a spinal cord injury during a high school football practice that left him paralyzed. Despite this challenging setback in his life, he refused to let my circumstances define me. Determined to achieve success, Keaston graduated from high school in the top of his class, earned a psychology degree at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in 2009, graduated from John Marshall Law School in 2012, and passed the bar on his first attempt. These successes gave Keaston the confidence to re-explore his dream. The exploration led him to voiceover, which allowed him to act beyond his disability. VO is now Keaston's passion, he is able to act with more versatility than he could have ever dreamed as an on-screen actor. Applying his determination to VO allows Keaston to consistently provide high-quality performances to his clients. Along with voice acting, Keaston is a motivational speaker and member of the Shepherd Center Peer Support Program mentoring others with spinal cord or brain injuries.

THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS

We are grateful to United Spinal Association's Corporate Members who have partnered in our mission, programs, and advocacy to improve the quality of life for all people with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D).

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