

Season Greetings from Graham Sisson, AL DAN President

Greetings! It has certainly been a busy year. We are building a statewide cross-disability coalition. Bringing people with all types of disabilities together to advocate for solutions to transportation, housing, healthcare, employment and education issues takes time. We will not see results instantly as lasting changes in a free society are incremental or one step at a time. I urge all AL DAN members to stay the course- we are on AL DAN's mission for the long haul. If you are not yet a member, I urge you to join. You can become a member by accessing AL DAN's web site at www.aladan.org and paying nominal \$10.00 membership dues. Membership is also available to organizations for \$50.00. Working together, we can accomplish anything.

As 2011 draws to a close, I want to thank AL Dan's officers and advisory board members for all of their hard work. A special thanks is given to Carl Flemons for all of his service. I also want to thank Beth Blalock for all of her efforts as AL DAN's project director. In 2011, we had a successful legislative day and regional meetings. We look forward to partnering with other organizations to hold a legislative day in 2012. Remember to meet with your legislators in your home areas. Good "homecooking" with legislators often is very effective.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Happy Noel! Chris Tidwell,

Vice President of AL DAN

May your Holidays be filled with cheer! I am blessed by the prayers and well wishes I have received during my illness.

As you make plans for the New Year, be sure to mark your calendars for AL DAN's Advocacy Day which will be held on Thursday, March 8. The 2011 Day was a tremendous success with over 90 people and 16 legislators present. Let's work to make 2012 even greater!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!!

From Carl Flemons, AL DAN's Secretary

First, let me say "thank you" to our Project Director, Beth Blalock, for all her hard work in organizing the regional meetings for Montgomery, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa held in November. It takes a good set of management skills, plus a lot of patience to pull together such a diverse group of people as we in AL DAN represent. So, I tip my hat to Beth for having what it takes to get the job done. I look forward to working with you in 2012 as AL DAN continues to grow and be the voice of all Alabamians with disabilities.

Second, AL DAN is growing. All of the Advisory Board members are recruiting new members, both individual and organizational. Graham Sisson, our president, is setting the bar pretty high for the rest of us. He has done the best job recruiting in both individual and organizational members. Again, Graham has put his money where his mouth is and is leading by example. "Thank you, Graham" for your work in helping AL DAN to continue to grow.

Third, since the Disability Summit in September, AL DAN has been on fire. We held regional meetings in Montgomery, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa that were a lot of fun. More regional meetings are being planned throughout the state. Huntsville, Anniston, Florence, and Dothan are some of the suggested cities. I attended a Medicaid 'Home and Community Based Waiver' training class in Huntsville and an ADRS Awards luncheon at Calhoun College in September. Both were interesting and informative. It was good to network with other disability advocacy leaders and distribute AL DAN membership applications. Also, at their October meeting, the Hartselle city council voted to allow group homes of up to 5 residents. On November 3, we held the ground-breaking for the new ILRGB facility located at Sixth Avenue North and 15th Street. Go see the progress, it is impressive!

And please, keep Chris Tidwell, our vice-president, in your prayers for her continued recovery.

Chris, we need you, especially as we get really busy in 2012. Hey, there is a lot going on and I am very excited for the role AL DAN will play in being the disability advocacy leader in Alabama. Again, MERRY CHRISTMAS.



A Look Back at a Milestone in Disability Advocacy: The 2011 Alabama Disability Summit and Expo

On September 8, 2011 the Governor's Office on Disability in partnership with the Birmingham Mayor's Office on Americans with Disabilities celebrated a new milestone in the disability advocacy movement at the Alabama Disability Summit and Expo at the Fair Park Arena. The Summit and Expo was an enormous success, with over 50 exhibitors and nearly 300 community participants coming together to participate in workshops, hear panel presentations, showcase disability-themed booths, and catch up with friends. The presentations featured a wide range of keynote speakers that addressed issues of transportation, emergency preparedness, health care, and strategic advocacy. Dan Kessler opened the ceremony with a reflection on the progress that has been made concerning disability rights, stating "Twenty years ago, accessibility was an afterthought; now, accessibility is the law. We've come a long way, and we still face many challenges." Highlights of the panel included Graham Sisson's State of the State on Disabilities in Alabama, Steve Hammerdinger's and Stephan Mambazo's presentations on emergency preparedness, and Chris Tidwell's call to action for self advocacy and to remember: "nothing about us without us." The exhibition area showcased the latest advancements in assistive technology and featured booths from several agencies, such as the United Way, the VA, and Independent Living Resources to name just a few. AL DAN's booth was a very popular stop! Brian, Danny, Elaine, Denice, Dana, and many others did a great job of handing out brochures, membership information, voter registration forms, and AL DAN souvenirs. Overall, the Summit was a great success, so a big thank you to everyone who helped make it so memorable!

Breaking Historic Ground: ILRGB Begins Construction of New Facility in Civil Rights District

On November 3, Independent Living Resources of Greater Birmingham celebrated its ground breaking ceremony at its new location on Birmingham's historic Civil Rights Trail. As many of you know, ILRGB tirelessly advocates for the rights and independence of those with disabilities, annually providing over 2,000 individuals with independent living services. ILRGB's new facility will be a one-of-a kind building, combining modern aesthetics with Universal Design concepts, and it will feature exhibit space honoring disability-rights movement and leaders. At the ceremony, nearly 150 community supporters braved the weather to hear congratulatory speeches from Mayor William Bell, Board President Graham Sisson, United Way President and CEO Drew Langloh, followed by the official ground breaking. The new ILRBG building, to be located at the corner of 6th Ave N and 15th St N, is currently under construction and is expected to open later in 2012.



Hello All and Happy Holidays!

My name is Dana Ullrich, and I have been volunteering with AL DAN since late August. We've accomplished a lot in the past few months, and I'd like to briefly share a few things about my wonderful experience with AL DAN. Right from the start, Beth put me to work preparing for the 2011 Alabama Disabilities Summit and Expo, which saw almost 300 participants and proved to be an amazing first experience for me as a volunteer. At the Summit, I met so many inspiring individuals and left feeling extremely eager to further educate myself on disability issues—specifically how to be a more effective self-advocate and community supporter. In October, I worked with Beth to petition against the proposed BJCTA budget cuts. I circulated petitions, wrote an op-ed piece on the subject, toured many of the threatened lines, and (along with several AL DAN members I was happy to see!) attended the Birmingham City Council meeting on transportation. In addition, I helped Beth put together a presentation on Helen Keller for the ARC Disability Conference and assisted in preparing for AL DAN's regional meetings. As my volunteering comes to an end, I just want to reiterate how special the past fifteen weeks have been for me. It's been a challenging, exciting, and incredibly rewarding experience, and I feel very blessed to have been a part of AL DAN's recent achievements. A heartfelt thanks to all who helped make this such a wonderful journey!