

UNH's Gravink Will Present Talk on Sport and Recreation for People with Disabilities at National Event

D.C. Conference Recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month

*By Sharon Keeler
UNH News Bureau*

DURHAM, N.H. -- Jill Gravink, founding director of Northeast Passage, a non-profit, community-based organization working in partnership with the University of New Hampshire, has been invited to speak at an Oct. 19 Washington, D.C., conference recognizing National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Gravink, of Nottingham, will participate in a roundtable discussion focused on funding issues for athletes with disabilities. Topics will range from entry-level therapeutic recreation to elite competition and the paralympics. Gravink will speak on health and wellness, and the importance of sport and recreation for non-elite athletes.

The day-long event will also include a morning demonstration and exhibit of equipment and adapted sports on the ellipse in front of the White House. Both the exhibition and roundtable are sponsored by the White House Office of Public Liaison and the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

According to Gravink, \$300 billion dollars are spent annually in lost wages and medical expenses when people with disabilities develop secondary medical conditions.

"How do therapeutic recreation programs impact this issue?" Gravink asks. "By helping people develop independent and active lifestyles that promote long-term health. Insurance companies are beginning to recognize the importance of healthy lifestyles for able-bodied people -- they're paying for health club memberships and fitness equipment. Now we want them to include funding for programs that promote

health in people with disabilities. A majority of the community-based organizations that provide sport and recreation opportunities are non-profits. They depend on third-party funding, including federal funding, for their existence."

According to Craig Gray, a consultant and one of the event organizers, Gravink was chosen to participate because of Northeast Passage's reputation as one of the nation's pre-eminent programs in providing recreational education and opportunities for people with disabilities.

"In terms of therapeutic recreation programs, Northeast Passage is recognized as tops in making a huge difference in people's lives," says Gray. "This includes people with disabilities, as well as their families and friends."

Operated out of the recreation management and policy department in UNH's School of Health and Human Services, Northeast Passage has received numerous national awards for its work. These honors have come from the National Therapeutic Recreation Society, the American Therapeutic Recreation Association, and the American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists.

October 14, 1999

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