Thanks for the Warm Welcome

We moved into a neighborhood 10 years ago where all the houses are ranches, which was our only real option given our son’s physical disability and subsequent use of a power wheelchair. I was pleased to see that one of my neighbors (kitty-corner across the street) was a residence of ladies who had physical disabilities. I offered our home as an option for their emergency plan, in case they needed shelter, and made acquaintances with them, some of which are still residing there.

I got to know my neighbor across the street quickly, and had an interesting conversation with him relative to his next door neighbors. He told me how he and others discussed suing the town over the ‘group home’ and informed me that what would have been my next door neighbor actually moved out because of it (God forbid, four women with cerebral palsy just moved in). When he concluded his mini-rant I said “Pete, you don’t want my son living in your neighborhood?” of which he replied, “I never said that.” I then said, “Yes, you did, because he might live in one of those houses someday.”

Fast forward to a presentation I did at Western New York Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day in May 2013. I had recounted this story to the audience, and after was approached by an attendee who stated she lived in that same house with her parents, and was completely accepted by her neighbors; however, as soon as the house turned into a residence for individuals with developmental disabilities, she was rejected by those very same neighbors.

I am prompted to write about this as I read the story of the Fountain, CO family that has neighbors threatening to sue because they have an accessible ramp to their front door so their daughter can get in her home. Did I hear this right? She can’t get in any other way. Why would a neighbor sue, property value! I’ve been doing this a long time, and have dealt with several neighbors who are ignorant to the facts. It doesn’t go down! We’ve had 40 years of ‘group homes’ and never has property value decreased.

But I digress, as I prefer to address the ‘welcoming’ these neighbors (and countless others who have responded this way) have bestowed upon the family. As a reminder to all, the disability community has new ‘members’ every day, and
any able-bodied person reading this, well, be prepared. The same people we want to sue to keep out of our neighborhoods may very well be you in the not too distant future. What happened to the apple pie to greet your neighbors?

We call this NIMBY (Not in my backyard) syndrome – “I have no problem with people with disabilities; just don’t build a house in my neighborhood.” This is discrimination, plain and simple.

And in all this, a young female is forced to wonder why she is not wanted, overlooked as a person who is being made a news clip, just because she needs (not wants) to get into her own home. It’s time to end the ignorance.

Link to article: http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/08/15/citing-property-ramp/18521/

For more information, please contact the First Responder Disability Awareness Training (FR-DAT) office 716-286-7355 or visit our website www.fr-dat.com.

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