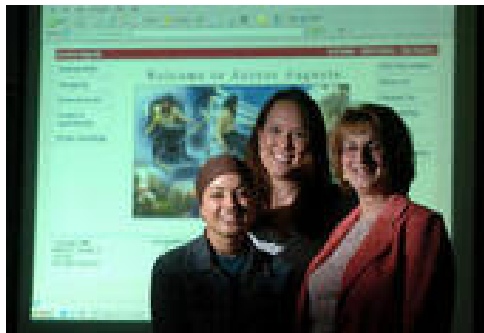


# Disabled access is assessed

By Tom Corwin *Staff Writer*

Friday, May 12, 2006

Sidra Ahmad remembers the awkward feeling of sitting in the wheelchair in Augusta Mall.



## Andrew Davis Tucker/Staff

Occupational therapy students Sidra Ahmad, (from left) and Kimberly Chu worked with assistant professor Donna Domyslawski to create the Access Augusta Web site.

[Click photo for options](#)

"I was just surprised how many people were looking at me and kind of staring," she said. And it can be more than awkward in some places in Augusta, it can be forbidding.

That's why Ms. Ahmad and some fellow graduate students in Occupational Therapy at the Medical College of Georgia did the survey of 95 area businesses in wheelchairs, even though they are not disabled, to find out how accessible the places are.

The results are available in a new Web site called Access Augusta. The school had done these surveys for 20 years, and others, such as Walton Options for Independent Living, do their own and publish them in a monthly newsletter.

"But there was no combined information for the community to use, so we thought this would be good for the community," Ms. Ahmad said.

The surprising result was that government buildings were for the most part accessible but some restaurants were not, said Donna Domyslawski, an assistant professor in the department and a mentor to the students.

"I think the majority of the things would be little things," Ms. Ahmad said. "The inside would be accessible, but the door would be too small. Or the door would be wide enough, the inside accessible, but there's no curb cut for the individual if he or she is in a wheelchair to get onto the sidewalk."

Sometimes it just seems to take making the owners aware of it, said graduate student Kimberly Chu.

"It all boils down to there has to be a complaint before it gets fixed," she said. "And it boils down to funding. The businesses, the proprietors are going to have to be the ones who make these accommodations."

As a paraplegic and advocacy coordinator for Walton Options, Shelia Kitchens-Wilson does her own accessibility surveys and tries to point out problems.

"Some of the things are becoming more accessible because of awareness. That's part of what we do," she said.

But having it available on a Web site is great for planning before leaving the house, Mrs. Kitchens-Wilson said.

"I know, as far as me with a disability, when we go into a town we look for this so that we will know where to go and what are the best places to eat and stuff like that," she said. "This is a benefit."

With about half of its business coming from senior citizens, Picadilly Cafeteria knows the importance of making sure it is accessible, said manager Paul Stabile.

"I'm sure that consciously (we've) been doing that over the years because of the tremendous amount of senior business that we have," he said.

That Fat Man's Forest didn't score well on issues such as maneuvering inside the

store aisles was news to manager Jan Stuntz.

"We try to keep the aisles clear. Nobody's ever brought that to our attention before," she said.

Reach Tom Corwin at (706) 823-3213 or [tom.corwin@augustachronicle.com](mailto:tom.corwin@augustachronicle.com).

## **HOW THEY MEASURED UP**

Those that scored well on the Access Augusta survey included:

- Picadilly Cafeteria, 3450 Wrightsboro Road and 3110 Washington Road
- Books-A-Million, 2834 Washington Road
- Circuit City, 239 Robert C. Daniel Jr. Parkway
- Evans Stadium Cinemas, 4365 Towne Center Drive.

Many of those with access problems were restaurants, including:

- Rhinehart's Oyster Bar, 3051 Washington Road, for difficulty in maneuvering in the aisles and inside the restaurant, lack of phone and lack of assistance
- Monterrey Mexican Restaurant, 4018 Washington Road, for lack of disabled-accessible bathrooms, phone and assistance and difficulty moving around the interior
- Davenport's, 301 Georgia Ave., for lack of disabled-accessible bathrooms, phone, loading zone and assistance

From the Friday, May 12, 2006 edition of the Augusta Chronicle