



George Venne and Audrey Aanes

## Right to Risk By Doug White, Executive Director

I can still remember the terror I felt when I first heard that the raft flipped on the Matanuska River pinning George underneath. George was one of the first residents of a nursing home in Anchorage to move out and live independently in the community. George used a wheelchair for mobility that he propelled with his feet as he was born with Cerebral Palsy. He had lived nearly his entire 45 years in a nursing home since his parents were unable to care for him. And he wanted out.

When George heard we were going on a rafting trip he was all about it. However, flipping the raft and getting pinned underneath was not part of the plan. George was eventually pulled out of the cold, rushing water unharmed. He actually had a good sense of humor about it. I was horrified. What went wrong, how do we keep that from ever happening again - my head swirled in considering a different outcome.



George Venne, Audrey Aanes, and Colleen Trout

"George was tired of a life without risk."

Over 30 years later, I have come to understand that while I was most concerned about the risk, I failed to realize that George was tired of a life without risk. He was tired of others choosing for him what he could or could not do - in order to keep him "safe." After 45 years in a nursing home George had a great Alaskan adventure he could sit around a campfire and tell others about.

The right and dignity of living independently is about an individual's choice for what level of risk they are willing to accept for themselves. Safety mitigates liability but it does not promote choice, self-sufficiency and independence. At Access Alaska we empower and advocate for people to make decisions to live their life as they so choose.

I will always remember George and his tenacity of spirit to live as he chose to live - risk and all.

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# Consumer Spotlight

## Distant From My Inability and Draw Near To My Ability

It is not the disabilities but the abilities that is in me that I want to focus on and share.

I hope not to leave an impression of despair, but one of hope and reflect how much my goals of success are set and I want life's best.

There are barriers and challenges I face but I am determined to finish my race.

I may have a different way of saying, doing and hearing than you, but here is a common ground to treat one another with respect and dignity. I often offer love and want you to know I care.

I was created by God to be me and no one else can I be.

Thanks to all who are a part of my life for whatever reason, season or life impact you may share with me in assisting and advocating for me to live independently and free.

### A Poem by Diane



## MISSION

Alaska is a place where every elder and person with a disability is empowered to advocate for full integration in their community of choice as an active, engaged, and valued member.

## VISION

Access Alaska encourages and promotes the total integration of people who experience a disability and elder Alaskans to live independently in the community of their choice.

## VALUES

- Integrity
- Excellence
- Choice
- Consumer Control
- Advocacy
- Empowerment
- Dignity
- Community-Based

# Board Member Spotlight

## Meet our Newest Board Member: Ryan Scottt

Ryan developed an early interest in disability rights and advocacy at the age of ten when she befriended a deaf teammate on her softball team. They became good friends and it prompted her to learn more about the Deaf Culture.

In 7th grade, Ryan worked with school staff members to start a petition to implement ASL (American Sign Language) services in the school. By her freshman year she knew she wanted to pursue ASL education and in her senior year she attended Palomar City College to further her ASL education.

After high school she attended Fresno City College to obtain an Associate of Arts Degree and then transferred to California State University, Fresno, and obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communicative Disorder Deaf Studies with an emphasis in Interpreting for

Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Kinesiology. Ryan worked at Fresno State University and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center for almost five years, where she provided interpretive services for University students and staff, Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and Deaf Blind in the community.

Ryan moved to Alaska a few years ago and began contracting with the school district as an educational interpreter and lived a year in the village of Nanwalek. She was recently hired by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as a Sign

**“I am a strong advocate of bridging the gap between the Hearing and Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.”**

states, “I am a strong advocate of bridging the gap between the Hearing and Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. I value professionalism, commitment to excellence and service to others. I am honored to serve on the Board of Access Alaska.”



Ryan Scottt, Board Member

Language Interpreter. Ryan brings energy, enthusiasm and passion to the Board of Directors. As she



# From Around the Agency

## Kenai Has a New Office

The Kenai Peninsula Office has Moved. We now have a new location in Soldotna with road side visibility, private offices and a large conference room. We are conveniently located on the Kenai Spur Highway and very close to downtown Soldotna. Ironically, we have moved back to our original location when we first opened our office there in 2003. Please stop by and visit us at: 36275 Kenai Spur Highway, Suite 5.



Our new office building

## Fairbanks Has a New Van

The Fairbanks youth Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) has a new, 15 passenger van to support our youth summer program. Thank you to our donors who made this possible; Jeff Cook, the Bachner Company, Inc. and Fairbanks Affordable Used Cars.



Our Pre-ETS Team with our new van: VISTA John Chavez, Independent Living Advocate Christine Charron, Independent Living Advocate Meagan Scheer, and VISTA Adrien Johnson,

Thank you to all our 2018 donors.  
**WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!**

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