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trance for the handicapped.

Shoppers with disabilities have plenty of suggestions for their favorite shopping centers on how to improve things. Members of the Center for Independent Living point out that curb cuts, ramps, and electric-powered doors also benefit parents with strollers, elderly shoppers, and customers recovering from heart surgery.

Money to spend

"We have money to spend, but some stores make it difficult for us to shop," said Mike Deane, a Lakeside Mall shopper. "Many store entrances are blocked for wheelchairs by double doors piled near the door. Also, the racks are too close together in the clothing stores, and I can't get my chair

through the aisles. Holidays are worse because the inventory is doubled and there is stuff everywhere."

Tim Steinbrink would like shopping centers to consider installing fitting rooms for the handicapped.

"Have you ever seen one?" he asked. "I end up bringing a bunch of clothes home and trying them on, then I must take them back for refunds or exchanges."

Other concerns include water faucets in restrooms that are difficult to turn on, then automatically shut off; paper towel racks set too high for wheelchair shoppers to reach; and handicapped parking spaces too narrow for van side lifts to function.

Bigger type on price tags would

benefit older shoppers and those with visual impairments, according to Steinbrink.

"It really all boils down to common sense," Deane said. "Persons with disabilities want equal access to goods and services, and the ADA assures that barriers to this end are removed."

Federal figures place the number of Americans living with disabilities at 43 million, or between 15 and 20 percent of the population. The ADA was signed into law on Jan. 6, 1990 by then-president George Bush, with compliance deadlines set for 18 months thereafter.

Shopping malls are only some of the public buildings required to

be accessible to those with disabilities. Grocery stores, medical offices, office buildings, municipal offices, museums, restaurants, lodgings and parks are also included.

First-hand experience

When Chuck Mitter, maintenance supervisor at the Tel-Twelve Mall in Southfield, broke his foot last year, he got around the mall in an electric scooter, experiencing firsthand the realities of being a wheelchair shopper.

"I discovered Tel-Twelve is very accessible," he said. "I also got an appreciation of what it's like to perform simple tasks from

a chair. Everything takes a little extra effort."

Malls are making the little extra effort to lend wheelchairs and electric carts to shoppers. They are adding ramps to Santa stages and Easter Bunny settings. They are adding directories in Braille to their mall maps, making sure telephones have assisted listening devices and indicating on brochures which restrooms have facilities for the handicapped.

Fees are stiff for companies that have made no effort to become accessible to the handicapped. Fines have been set at \$50,000 for the first offense and \$100,000 for subsequent offenses. Three malls are hosting day-

long seminars for persons with disabilities. The "Focus on Ability Expo" promises to reveal "everything you ever wanted to know about being an independent person with a disability." It will be held from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the following Saturdays: July 10 at Tel-Twelve Mall; Aug. 28 at the Westland Center; and Sept. 25 at the Macomb Mall. For more information call 288-4160.

For more information about the ADA contact the Equal Employment Commission's ADA helpline at 1-800-669-3366; or the Dept. of Justice, Office of ADA Information Line, 1-202-514-0301; or write 1801 L St. NW, Washington D.C. 20507.

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Bonnick credits the Northwest Skill Center's principal, Earl Dawson, with coordinating the effort to get disabled people into the community. Due to his diligence, she said, several local businesses have hired the handicapped or taken them on as student interns.

Skill center students work at the nearby Ramada Inn, Penney's Warehouse and Digitron, to name a few.

The Northwest Skill Center is a division of the Livonia Public Schools, serving students 18 to 26

years old from 13 neighboring communities. The center teaches mentally and physically challenged students vocational and personal adjustment skills.

Though the students receive no financial compensation for their

services at the mall, the mall's Thomas said they are often treated to lunch and given mall gift certificates for their work.

For more information about the program call the Northwest Skill Center at 523-9388.

ACLU takes its case to the people locally

Love 'em or hate 'em, the American Civil Liberties Union is coming to town. The organization will be taking its case to the people with a lecture from Howard

Simon, executive director of the ACLU's Michigan chapter.

Topics will include the ACLU's position on assisted suicide, the death penalty, restrictions on

abortion, gay rights, and school prayer.

The lecture will follow the group's business meeting, and

will begin at 7:30 p.m., June 24, at the Bloomfield Township Library. For more information, please call the ACLU's state office at 961-4682.

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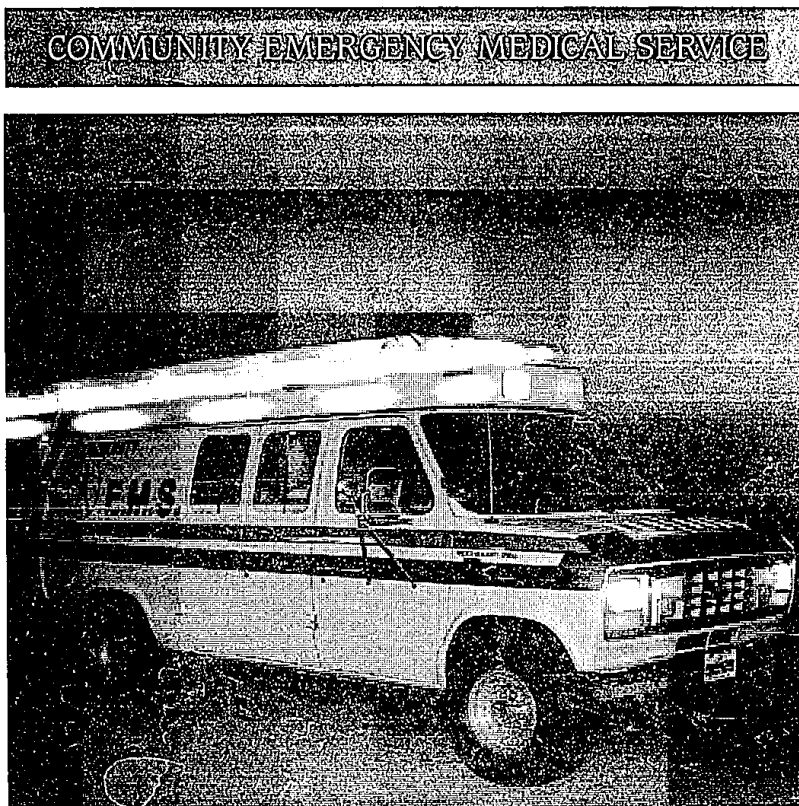
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