

The Need Exists

The Opportunity Exists

The Spirit Exists



North American Adaptive Indoor & On-water Programs

In 2003, Dr. Ed Melian, an adaptive rower, asked me if the *Chicago Indoor Rowing Championships* had an adaptive event. My response: ‘we don’t but we should’. As a previous head of special education for Proviso Township, I personally experienced the destructive force of exclusion as elementary and high school students with disabilities were isolated from the general school population. Our staff transformed that culture and in the process witnessed the profound effects inclusion had *not only for the disabled but also for all students, parents and faculty*. Able and disabled alike grew to respect, understand and work together for common educational and personal goals. The transformation was nothing less than astounding. The lessons learned have become guiding principles that illuminate the mission of the **CIRC Adaptive Initiative**.

CIRC immediately introduced an adaptive event in 2004. However, with the exception of Dr. Melian, no one came. ‘*Build it and they will come*’ may work for Hollywood but not in reality. It was clear that disabled Chicagoans were unaware of rowing whether indoor or on-water. This was not surprising. Nationally, there was only one program in Philadelphia led by Isabella Bohn dedicated to adaptive rowing. Indoor and On-water programs are rare due to lack of:

- Understanding the needs and opportunities
- Innovative program development
- Coordination between servicing institutions
- Suitable equipment modifications
- Accessible facilities
- Outreach programs

Regrettably, with the exception of the Canadians and the British, outreach efforts not to mention integrated programs are virtually non-existent in the U.S.A. Most programs that do exist –see map above- struggle to accommodate interest. Disabled sport is not on the radar: even today, **NBC**, the official media sponsor, does not have a link to the *Paralympics* on www.nbcolympics.com/ site.

These realities propelled us to act. On February 17th, 2007 the **CIRC Adaptive Initiative** was launched. Our objective was to gain insight, explore the status of equipment and current programs hence frame future discussions and pursue cooperative efforts. Although our expectations were moderate, the response was not. (See **Historical Overview**)

Much has happened in the 2-years since. As I write, rowing is being introduced for the first time at the **2008 Paralympics** in Beijing. Add to this the pride we all feel as the possibility grows for Chicago to host the **2016 Olympic/Paralympic** games. Over the past year and a half, **CIRC** has participated in 10 events and exposed over to 6,000 individuals - abled and disabled alike- to the possibilities offered by indoor rowing. We have seen Middle School kids help blind youngsters experience indoor rowing and then held their hands as they guided them into the seat of an actual racing shell to experience the magnificent surge as it glided through the water.



We have seen wheelchair athletes become fascinated at the possibility of a new competitive sport.



And we have seen volunteers return event after event to, support, guide, instruct and encourage anyone, regardless of age, ability or disability to explore this wonderful inclusive activity.



The lessons of the *Adaptive Initiative* are clear:

Build It

Reach Out

Be Inclusive

They will Come