

Week focuses on abilities of handicapped

Activities to demonstrate competence of the disabled

By MARC McDONALD
Staff Writer

The purpose of NT Handicap Awareness Week, which runs through Saturday, is to inform people about the abilities of handicapped people, rather than their disabilities.

The annual event is part of a national weeklong observance called National Employ the Handicapped Week. The event is sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Students.

Barbara Jungjohan, associate dean of students, said the theme for the week for this year is "Celebrate the Abilities."

"A great deal needs to be done to change the public's attitude toward disabled students," she said. "We want them to look at the abilities that are there, rather than what a handicapped person can't do."

Activities today include "Art for All Senses," in the University Union Gallery, which features multimedia art by faculty, staff and students. The North Texas Rehabilitation Association has an information table in the lobby outside the Post Office in the Union.

The information table features information for both disabled and able-bodied students. It also has tests for color perception and hand and eye coordination and features a test called "Are you a handicap to the disabled?" which tests people for preconceptions they may harbor toward the handicapped.

"Sometimes people are afraid to talk to disabled people because they're afraid they'll say the wrong thing," Jungjohan said. "Our goal and aim is to help able-bodied persons see disabled people as human beings first, with the same emotions, feelings, desires and life goals that able-bodied persons have."

Getting the public to overcome their prejudices toward the disabled is also a goal of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission of Denton. A vocational counselor with the organization, Tom Hudgens, said one major problem the handicapped face is job discrimination.

The Texas Rehabilitation Commission provides vocational counseling, vocational training and job placement services to the disabled, Hudgens said.

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the handicapped by many employers," Hudgens said. "Some employers think if they hire a handicapped individual, their worker's compensation insurance rates will go up."

Hudgens said this is not true and that studies have indicated that the handicapped are actually more careful on the job than able-bodied people.

Difficulties with transportation is another problem handicapped people face, Hudgens said. Many handicapped people do not have the money to modify vehicles. Many disabled people must depend on others for their transportation and this can prove to be a barrier in their finding employment, he said.

Hudgens said programs for the handicapped have suffered under Reagan administration budget cuts. This has hurt the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, which depends exclusively on government funds, he said.

Job training programs for the disabled pay for themselves, Hudgens said, because they result in new taxpayers. He said Texas ranks in the top five states in its programs to train the disabled to become part of the work force.

Handicapped people should be given equal opportunity in the workplace, Hudgens said.

"I think if a handicapped person is given a chance to work, then he should be treated like everyone else. If they can do the job, they should be paid the same as anyone else for doing it."

Hudgens said a popular misconception about handicapped people is that they do not want to work. He said there may be some handicapped people who don't want to work, but no greater a ratio than the general population.