

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCATE TAKES HELM OF DRF IN EMPIRE STATE

BY AMY TORRES, STAFF WRITER

There are movers and there are shakers. And then there is Janice Schacter. Schacter, 44, brings an astonishing history of successful hearing health advocacy to her new role as executive director of the Deafness Research Foundation (DRF). As the mother of a 12-year-old daughter who has hearing loss, Schacter's initial involvement with hearing health advocacy was directly related to ensuring that her daughter had complete access to school field trips and entertainment venues. Her "can-do" attitude and tireless lobbying of museums, theaters, places of worship and other venues in New York City has resulted in hearing-accessible technology in these same venues that will benefit a wide audience of people with hearing loss.

"These places did not feel that they needed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and since no one was complaining, they just got away with it for a long time," says Schacter. "Now that induction loops and better signage have been installed in these places, people with hearing loss are coming forward in droves to express how thrilled they are with the improvements!"

Schacter is not just targeting museums and theaters. In March of this year, along with other advocates for people with disabilities, Schacter called for hearing-accessible taxis in

New York City at a press conference on the steps of City Hall. The group urged the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission

to go one step further with its plan to install new passenger information monitors (PIM) in all taxicabs by also installing induction loop systems in taxis and including captioning on the new PIM screens.

"The City told me they forgot to take the ADA into consideration when they negotiated the PIM contracts," Schacter says. "How does a city agency 'forget' the ADA that has been around for almost 17 years?"

As a former practicing attorney, Schacter knows that the law is on her side and that getting public and private entities to become compliant is mostly a matter of reminding them about the ADA and getting them to see the value of the related expenses.

"It's not rocket science," she says. "It's more about showing these organizations that many of their patrons have an 'invisible' disability. Since you don't 'see' hearing loss, it's easy to forget about it. When they realize how many more people will be able to enjoy their services with

a few low-cost modifications, they have a direct buy-in to making the improvements."

Taking the helm of DRF was the logical next step for a person who believes passionately in change. Speaking of which, one of Schacter's first tasks as executive director will be to relocate DRF headquarters to New York City, a move she believes will put DRF in the best possible position for global leadership in hearing health. She is also eager to bring DRF back to its roots and its mission of promoting and funding research for solutions to the remaining obstacles to hearing health for all people.

"People who are deaf and hard of hearing often feel a sense of hopelessness – like things will never improve – but the action of one person can effect positive change." Schacter pauses. "Change is what DRF is really committed to and I'm confident that we can make it happen both locally and globally." ■



March 4, 2007: Janice Schacter, DRF executive director, testifies in New York City on the steps of City Hall about the need for the city's taxis to be ADA-compliant. Front row from left: Arielle Schacter, Janice Schacter and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer.

Photo courtesy of Janice Schacter