

January 26, 2009

Millions of travelers with disabilities will be able to search for and reserve accessible hotel rooms through Hotels.com and Expedia.com, thanks in part to Public Justice. Under an internationally-significant settlement of a civil rights lawsuit announced today, Hotels.com and Expedia.com, two of the world's leading online travel companies, have agreed to add features to their online travel reservation systems to better serve disabled travelers.

The civil rights lawsuit stemmed from Hotels.com's refusal to guarantee a reservation for wheelchair-accessible room. Instead, it treated accessibility as an optional "amenity", like a king-sized bed. Individuals with disabilities could not find out whether an accessible room was available until after they traveled to their destination and checked in at the hotel.



Two members of AXIS Dance Company were plaintiffs in a class action against hotels.com, which refused to guarantee reservations for wheelchair-accessible rooms.

Plaintiffs in *Smith v. Hotels.com L.P.* are Bonnie Lewkowicz and Judith Smith, members of the [AXIS Dance Company](#), a not-for-profit company of professional dancers with and without disabilities based in Oakland, California. They were represented by Public Justice, [Disability Rights Advocates](#) (DRA), and the Mill Valley, California class action law firm, [Chavez & Gertler LLP](#). Ms. Smith and Ms. Lewkowicz rely on wheelchairs for mobility and had been unable to make reservations on hotels.com for the accessible rooms they needed when touring with the dance company.

As part of the settlement, Hotels.com and Expedia.com will gather information about hotels' accessibility features, and will incorporate that information into their websites so that travelers will be able to search for and make special requests online to book accessible rooms. Each special request will be given individual attention by a trained customer service representative, who will work with the customer to accommodate his or her needs. The new website features will be rolled out later this year.

For more information about the lawsuit and settlement, please go to Public Justice's website, at www.publicjustice.net, or to DRA's website, at www.dralegal.org.

"For years, travelers with disabilities have been unable to take advantage of the convenience and low cost options of booking hotel rooms online," said plaintiff Bonnie Lewkowicz. "Now, for the first time, I will be able to reserve a hotel room online that meets my needs, just like anyone else."

Special thanks to Sid Wolinsky and Kevin Knestrick of DRA; Mark Chavez and Nance Becker of Chavez & Gertler; and Victoria Ni and Leslie Bailey of Public Justice for their fantastic work on the case, and to you too, for making this work possible.

Arthur Bryant
Executive Director

& the Public Justice Foundation

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