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PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
February 22, 2007**

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Ability Goes International

February 22, 2007- On February 1, 2007 National Ability Center CEO, Meeche White, returned from Thailand with her team of seven athletic coaches after spending three weeks on an international adaptive sports exchange funded by the U.S. Department of State Cultural Affairs Division. The team included athletes and therapeutic recreation specialists Muffy Davis, Danny Quintana, Rich St. Dennis, Jake Heilveil, and Ability Center Program Manager Lauren Artesani. The team worked closely with *The Redemptorist Foundation* for people with disabilities to create community based adaptive recreation programs in Thailand.

"This trip was about breaking barriers," said White about her experience, "Thailand is just beginning to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream culture. We did more than just teach them about adaptive recreation. Our team gave them the tools and encouragement to get out there and do it!"

The team spent equal time in the cities of Chiang Mai and Pattaya, Thailand. White found the Thai people to be most gracious and enthused by the National Ability Center's efforts. Both cities held opening and closing ceremonies in honor of the team. The ceremonies included traditional food, music and entertainment, fireworks, and cultural blessings.

The team engaged in 3-4 days of coach training followed by 3-4 days of working with participants averaging ages 13-18 years old in each location. The goal was to build programs which would be self sustaining both functionally and financially. In addition to training, the National Ability Center provided each location 3 hand cycles, over a dozen tennis racquets with balls, and 50 wheelchairs provided through the *Mobility Project* in Seattle, WA.

"Many of the people we gave wheelchairs to had been previously isolated in their homes due to a lack of mobility," remarked White, "It was fantastic to see a child wheel themselves out of their house for the first time."

Eight of the coaches that the center trained in Thailand will be traveling to Park City, UT for additional training and observance of the National Ability Center's program this coming June. The National Ability Center, a nonprofit organization, is proud to serve as an international model for the development of adaptive recreation programs world wide. In addition to Thailand the center has already assisted programs in Italy, Spain, Chile, Korea and Poland.

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