

RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER ON  
**Independent Living**

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**KU's Research and Training Center on Independent Living Celebrates 25 Years**

LAWRENCE, KS-- The Research and Training Center on Independent Living (RTC/IL), just tapped by the federal government to investigate how people with disabilities fared during and after Hurricane Katrina, celebrates its 25th anniversary Saturday, Oct. 22. Part of the celebration includes a public panel discussion featuring Fabricio Balcazar, associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Michael Jones, vice president for research and technology at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, GA, and co-director of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Mobile Wireless Technologies Design, at the Dole Institute of Politics in Lawrence from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.



Keynote speakers Max and Colleen Starkloff, who have worked in the United States and abroad to increase awareness of disability issues, founded Paraquad in 1970, now one of the largest and most successful independent living centers in the nation. Through their work, millions of people with disabilities have benefited from improved independent living services, greater access to education and jobs, increased community access, more accessible public transportation, accessible housing and disabled license plates and parking. The Starkloffs recently left Paraquad to start The Starkloff Disability Institute dedicated to help people with disabilities participate fully and equally in all aspects of society.

The RTC/IL, directed by Glen W. White since 2002 and for the previous 22 years by James F. Budde, has built an international reputation as one of the few academic research groups on the independence of people with disabilities.

Budde and others in the KU and disability communities applied for and won a competitive grant to establish the RTC/IL in 1980, funded by what is now called National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

The Independent Living epiphany that was exploding beliefs about disability all over the country had come to Kansas.

"Consumer control — that individuals with disabilities are to be treated as consumers of services and control their own lives — was and is the cornerstone of our mission," said Budde.

Through the years and \$16 million of grant funding, the RTC/IL has influenced public policy through developing national standards for independent living centers and influenced public perception of people with disabilities through its million-seller, *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities*, parts of which have been incorporated in standard references for journalists.

The RTC/IL has trained disability researchers, teachers and policymakers from across the United States and around the globe through its junior colleague model in which graduate students from diverse disciplines work on research teams.

Some stay, as did White, the first scholarship recipient of the Independent Leadership Training Program. White, a behavioral scientist, uses a wheelchair and knows firsthand that even with the sweeping mandate of Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, researchers have had to show, through research as well as advocacy, exactly what it takes for people with disabilities to live independently.

In fact, if you use a wheelchair, you can thank White for being able to attend a Kansas City Royals baseball games, have accessible bathrooms at Kansas City International Airport or simply get to your office or classroom in KU's Dole Human Development Center, where the RTC/IL is located.

While many people with physical disabilities have realized independence in the last decade since ADA, much more needs to be known about how to serve people in

developing countries, as well as minority and rural communities in this country, and, according to White, the RTC/IL is well prepared.

"Our research group is as diverse as any anywhere," he said. "We live it." One of White's recent master's degree graduates, Hoang-Yen Thi Vo, one of the first three Ford Fellows from Vietnam who was barred from employment in her country, is living it: She is developing the first Independent Living Center in Vietnam.

The Research and Training Center on Independent Living is one of the 14 centers and more than 100 programs at KU's Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies that offer research-based solutions for the problems of human and community development, disabilities and aging.

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