

Travels with Bob *by Gordon Kerby*

Bob, my patient wife and I went off on another trip. This time, at the gentle urging of the Polio Déjà View editor, we visited **Stony Point Fashion Park (Fashion Park)**, to give you our observations about the accessibility of the place.

First, however, I need to briefly explain something. If you missed the last issue, you would not know that Bob is the name of my trusty three-wheeled scooter that enables me to take these jaunts. So, now lets go to the Fashion Park.

Opened in September of this year, Stony Point Fashion Park has 3200 parking spaces. Of these, 46 are designated as handicapped. They are evenly spaced around the Fashion Park in clusters varying from 2 to 6 spaces each. It is an open mall with an interior common area. I'll refer to it as the courtyard. You can get directly into the courtyard via five easily accessible walkways. A sidewalk circles the Fashion Park, so look for the curb cuts carefully, especially when you're leaving the mall. I nearly missed a curb cut and almost took a sudden, unexpected drop off of the curb. The two most popular entrances are on the northern side where P.K. Chang's and the Brio Tuscan Grille are located and on the eastern end where the Champs Restaurant and the Rio Grande Cafe are located. There are six handicapped parking spaces at each of these entrances.

Before we go into the courtyard to visit the stores, we found that you have the option of going into the three anchor stores, Dillards, Saks and Galyans, directly from the parking lots. These three stores are all handicapped accessible. Dillards has doors that open automatically and both Saks and Galyans have convenient press pads that allow you entry. The aisles inside these three stores are also scooter friendly. But if you're not in a hurry, you can visit all of the stores by scooting in the courtyard. The courtyard is easy to negotiate and in nice weather, it is a pleasant place to scooter and window shop. If you need directions or information to a store, you can scooter up to the convenient customer service building located in the middle of the courtyard. Customer service also has four complimentary wheelchairs that are available on a first come-first serve basis. And being an out door mall, you can also rent an umbrella there if you're caught in the rain, since not all of the stores have awnings or overhangs to shelter you from inclement weather.

The Fashion Park has approximately ninety stores, all on one level. As I mentioned before, the three anchor stores are quite accessible. In scooting around the courtyard, I found only one other store that had a device to automatically open the door, and that was Hollisters, a 20s something clothing store. I'm a little past the age for that style of clothing, so I didn't go in. Anyway, what I found while scooting around the courtyard, was typically what you find at such a mall. None of the smaller stores (with that one exception) have built-in easy access into the stores. However, if its nice day, a lot of the businesses do keep their doors open which makes entry very easy. And based on my experiences there, if the clerks inside see you at the door outside, they'll gladly help you get in. But if not, you may need a companion to help you open the doors of the store that you would like to visit.

But before we would try to go in a store, we could generally tell by window shopping there, whether it was scooter accessible or not. Our observations from doing it that way, was that the accessibility of these stores, ranged from excellent (nice scooter wide aisles) to impossible (very narrow aisles). We didn't visit all ninety stores of course, though my wife

would have liked to have tried (just kidding). On our visits there, we had wanted to visit several specific stores and along the way, we stopped in several restaurants. So here's a sentence or two on some of the places we visited as well as an interesting feature that we found in a number of the stores. They all have manually opening doors, including the restaurants.

Dillards, Saks and Galyans – I've already mentioned them, so you know about their accessibility.

Smith & Hawkin – We found generally scooter friendly wide aisles and a public handicapped accessible restroom. More on that subject later.

Restoration Hardware – Bob and I had trouble negotiating beyond the front of the store. So we found that this store was not very scooter friendly. They also have a public handicapped accessible restroom, though it looked difficult to get to.

Sur La Table – The aisles were scooter friendly, but there were some tight spots inside the store.

Storehouse – We found generally scooter friendly aisles and so we were able to maneuver through most of the store. They also have a public handicapped restroom

Public handicapped accessible restrooms— Many of the stores have this kind of restroom, even if it looks from the outside of the store that it is not scooter accessible. Just look for the decal down low on the storefront glass. I only visited two of these facilities and found that they appear to be designed for wheelchair access, not scooters, with oversize doors that you may find difficult to open. In my situation, I parked Bob beside the restroom and walked inside. If you're unable to do this, it may be a problem. On the plus side, it's a nice convenience to have these facilities located throughout the Fashion Park and so, not have to go to the general public restrooms located at one end of the courtyard.

Now on to restaurants-

Starbucks – Has a handicapped marked table just inside the door, where you can park your scooter, but you'll have to walk to the counter to place your order.

Brio Tuscan Grille – Has a location just inside the door, where you can park your scooter and walk to the table if you're able.

P.F. Chang's China Bistro – They don't have a designated spot for parking the scooter, but they said that they could find a place to park a scooter if necessary.

Rio Grande Café – They let you park your scooter at an out of the way corner with the baby strollers.

You probably read and heard that this is a dog-friendly mall. On our visits there, we saw very few dogs and those we saw were generally well behaved. So we didn't have any trouble with dogs barking at Bob or trying to bite his tires.

Anyway, this is again a quick accessibility review of a large regional mall and I'm still learning how to do such writing. Next time, when I look at restaurants, I'll be more observant about overall scooter access to the dining tables.

I hope you will find this information helpful when you visit there.