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## Ice Palace meets needs of disabled

**SUMMARY:**When the Ice Palace opens, planners say it will be among the most accommodating arenas for disabled patrons.

By **JOE HENDERSON**  
of the Tampa Tribune

TAMPA - When Kevin McGuire was 7 years old, a drunken driver careened out of control and onto a field where he was playing baseball. That was in 1968, and McGuire has since spent his life using a wheelchair.

He now operates a consulting company to help bring municipal arenas into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

McGuire has been working with planners at the Ice Palace for several months, and at a news conference Friday he said that when the \$154 million arena opens early next month, it will be among the most

accommodating to the disabled in the country.

"This building has more flexibility for the disabled than any other building I've ever seen," he said. "And there is a real commitment by the [Tampa Bay Lightning] owners in this area."

About 365 seats at Lightning games will be made available to disabled patrons. McGuire said the range of services will go beyond just seating.

Arrangements have been made for special parking and concessions. Braille menus will be available at the refreshment counters, and arena workers will have taken training in sign language. There also has been sensitivity training so workers will be more aware of the needs of disabled fans.

He said that some fans aren't even aware they have disabilities, such as failing

hearing or eyesight. Arena workers will be trained to spot those needs and lend assistance.

"Almost everything you do has an ADA implication," McGuire said.

“We’ve put an awful lot of time and thought into accessibility of the building for the disabled.”

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**Lightning spokesman  
Gerry Helper**

He also promised a special effort to hire disabled workers for arena jobs and said a special open house will be held at the Ice Palace in November to address additional concerns patrons might have.

McGuire said the arena will be on guard against scams from fans who say they're disabled to get preferential treatment, but aren't.

"We don't want a rash of people coming to the games who are suddenly disabled," he said, adding that fans who try that ruse could lose their tickets.

An estimated \$2.5 million has been spent to bring the Ice Palace into full compliance for the disabled. Lightning spokesperson Gerry Helper said compliance has been a priority since the early planning stages.

"We've put an awful lot of time and thought into accessibility of the building for the disabled," he said.

"We began having staff meetings and training on this area in March, and we're working very hard to develop awareness of the disabled's needs."