Alum Profile  CAS’83

Making America Accessible
From his wheelchair, Kevin McGuire leads the charge

KEVIN MCGUIRE REMEMBERS when wheelchair users could enter a building only through the service entrance, when those who were blind didn’t go to the movies, and those who were deaf could never enjoy the opera.

McGuire (CAS’83), CEO of McGuire Associates, a consulting firm specializing in compliance with federal and state disability laws, has made it his life’s work to see that venues around the country are accessible to all. And that “all” includes him; McGuire is paralyzed from the waist down.

“I know accessibility laws probably better than anyone else in this country,” says McGuire, sitting in his custom-made titanium wheelchair. “It’s meaningful for me. When I have people come up to me because they had a great experience at a Broadway show or a baseball game, I feel good knowing that I had a big part in making their experience so great.”

McGuire has worked with almost every major arena, stadium, ballpark, and concert venue in the country, and Gillette Stadium, in Foxborough, Mass., is one of his favorites. It was important to the Kraft Group, he says, that the stadium, built in 2002 and home to the New England Patriots, exceed all requirements set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on physical or cognitive disability. The act requires, in part, that public venues provide van-accessible parking, assisted listening devices, and American Sign Language interpreters.

At Gillette, McGuire oversaw full compliance with ADA regulations, which includes accessible restrooms, concession stands, and telephones, and captioning and game description. He also helped train the stadium’s 3,000 employees to assist disabled guests.

McGuire, 50, was paralyzed at age 7, when he was hit by a drunk driver. After earning a bachelor’s in history and political science at BU’s College of Arts & Sciences, McGuire went on to Georgetown Law. He served on BU’s Board of Trustees from 1982 to 1983.

In the late 1980s, working as an assistant district attorney in New York’s Bronx County district attorney’s office, McGuire saw a newspaper ad inviting people in wheelchairs to try out for the Oliver Stone film Born on the Fourth of July, a true story of a paralyzed Vietnam veteran who becomes an antiwar activist. McGuire landed the role of a disabled veteran who protests along with the lead character, played by Tom Cruise. He also taught Cruise how to use a wheelchair.

After the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, McGuire knew there would be a need for consultants, and he founded McGuire Associates in 1991. Since then, his company has worked for 200 clients, including most of the country’s national sports teams, Live Nation concert venues, the White House Visitor Center, the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles, and Boston’s Symphony Hall. He advises on a range of issues, including policy, procedures, and training of employees, and he works as a liaison with government agencies.

McGuire says that while making public spaces accessible is the law, it’s also smart business. The number of Americans over the age of 65 will jump from 40 million in 2010 to 70 million by 2030.

“The older this country gets, the more disabled it becomes,” he says. “There are people with these disposable incomes who aren’t being reached out to. They’re used to going to restaurants, going to the movies, and they don’t want to stop going just because their vision is fading.”

Amy Laskowski