

North Central College and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

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Students’ Reactions

“Being the first full-time student in A wheelchair, I have often felt like the guinea pig for the committee on compliance with the ADA.”

In 1994, student Jen Fontecchio voiced her difficulties participating in campus events with a wheelchair. She pointed out several inaccessible buildings, such as Old Main, Goldspohn, and Pfeiffer Hall. While Fontecchio acknowledged the willingness of North Central’s staff to accommodate her to the best of their ability, without major renovations done to the physical plant, she was unable to fully access all that North Central had to offer. Fontecchio urged North Central to **“go forward, and provide an equal opportunity for all.”**



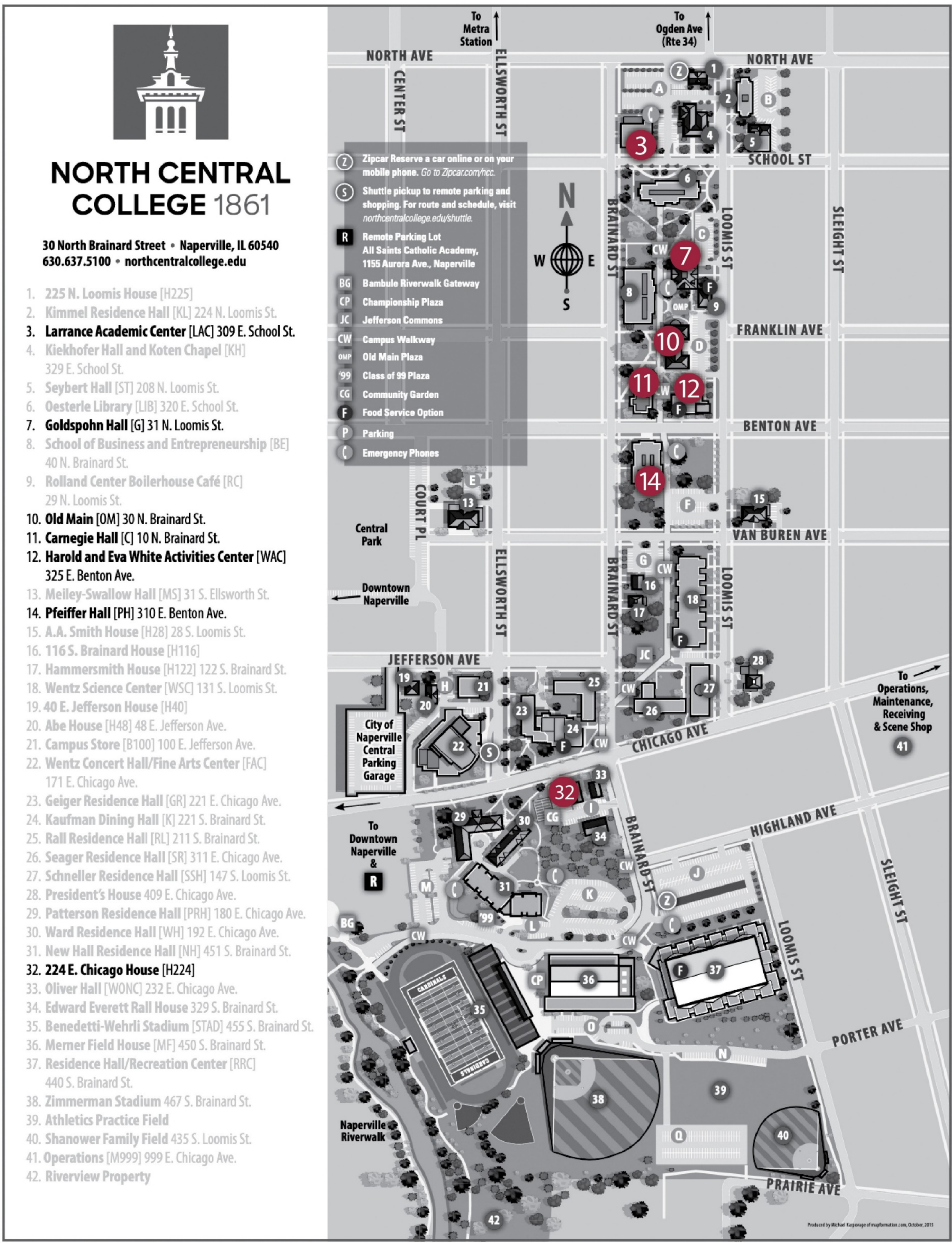
Old Main now has a wheelchair ramp leading to the bottom floor. Many renovations were done during interim.

Changes to the Physical Plant

In 1992, renovations began on campus, starting with plans to remodel several building entrances and restrooms to meet ADA guidelines. As of 1994, five buildings on North Central’s campus were completely wheelchair accessible. According to Roseanne Sablich, Coordinator of Business Operations, the college took a **“phased-in approach to meeting the requirements of the ADA.”** Awareness surrounding accessibility continued to grow throughout the decade. By 1997, major plans to renovate Goldspohn and Old Main finally began, promising improved handicap accessibility and the installation of elevators. Suzanne Hammonds, Director of Business Operations, commented on the changes to Old Main, stating, **“We are more aware now, to have the ability for any handicapped person to get into the building.”**

Background Information

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that seeks to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, both mental and physical, in part by prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation. While North Central College is a private institution, the ADA covers all primary, secondary, and higher educational establishments. When the ADA was passed in 1990, for the first time North Central College was required by law to reasonably accommodate students and staff with disabilities, and it was also responsible for meeting certain architectural standards regarding both new and old construction. In the decade following the ADA, North Central’s campus faced several challenges in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.



Map of North Central College campus buildings renovated to comply with ADA guidelines between 1990 and 1999

North Central College Administration

Student advocates awareness of learning disabled students

“These people should know that there are people who want to help them and that they don't have to go through it alone.”

While North Central College first took an individualized approach in accommodating students with disabilities, working with students on a case by case basis, student activist Alexa Darby, saw the need for a larger support system within the college’s administration. Darby recognized the difficulties many students faced with having to advocate for themselves within the classroom, especially for those with learning disabilities. Forming a support group for students with disabilities in 1992, Darby worked alongside the Academic Advising Center to establish a resource for students who needed accommodation. President of the college, Harold R. Wilde, said of Darby’s work, **“her voice has become an enduring element in the conscience of the College.”** Today, you can find NCC’s Student Disability Support Services organized under the Center for Student Success.

Sample Bibliography

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