



# *Chic*



# chairs

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Associates



A wheelchair can be a bold fashion statement as well as an empowering mobility aid.

## What would a St. John

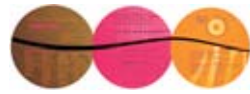
wheelchair look like? Rich in color, elegant, and sophisticated like the designer's fashion collections?

How about a Kimora Lee Simmons Baby Phat chair? Pink, funky, and fabulous?

And what about chairs from Nicole Miller, Zang Toi, Marc Bouwer, Lloyd Klein, and Thom Brown?

This veritable “who’s who” of fashion designers donated their time and talent to create one-of-a-kind designer Quickie wheelchairs—as well as complementary fashion ensembles—for their “Roll Models,” four women who were chosen (through a national search) for their inspirational

Wearing a women's black suit designed by Thom Browne, Discovery Through Design's originator, Wendy Crawford, models a Quickie Ti manual wheelchair almost totally covered with 40,000 Swarovski crystals.



responses to their disabilities. Discovery Through Design (DTD), a not-for-profit organization founded by four amazing women in wheelchairs, tapped these top designers for its first fund-raising event, the “Rolling with Style Gala.”

The gala took place February 6 at Cipriani at 42nd Street during New York’s couture Fashion Week. Hosted by Lesley Stahl, of CBS’s *60 Minutes*, the evening of celebration included a black-tie dinner, a fashion show with super models as well as Roll Models, and live entertainment. All proceeds, plus donations from generous sponsors, benefited the Christopher Reeve Foundation, The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, and The Spinal Cord Injury Project at Rutgers University.

A portion of the night was devoted to spotlighting the many successful women with disabilities in the audience. Said journalist Santina Muha, 23, one of the featured women, “I have always wanted to be included in New York’s Fashion Week. It’s about time a successful event like this generated as much mainstream attention as it did.”

Other attendees included Dr. Ruth, 2006 Miss Universe Zuleyka Rivera, ABC’s *The Bachelor* Prince Lorenzo Borghese, Fabian Basabe, Catherine Forbes, Chudney Ross, Irina Panteva, Kim Alexis, Deborah Gibson, and U.S. Army SFC Diane Cochran.

Representing not only women with SCI but also all women in the military, Cochran received the “Rolling with Style” Award. Injured two years ago in Afghanistan and the mother of an American soldier now stationed in Iraq, she has had many leadership positions throughout her military career. She also was a medal winner at the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska.

DTD’s four founders and “chairwomen” of Rolling with Style are Marilyn Hamilton (Carmel, Calif.), Ashley Lauren Fisher (Morristown, N.J.), Wendy Crawford (Miami Shores, Fla.), and Julia Dorsett (Boca Raton, Fla.). Each was on life’s fast track when varying accidents

Zang Toi dressed Roll Model Jenny Smith in a silk knee-length print of full-bloomed red roses. Smith receives double exposure here, in person and on the big screen, as she shows off her ensemble.

robbed them of their mobility. However, they didn't lose their dignity or passion for life.

"Properly fitted wheelchairs that look great not only give us confidence but also allow us to get out there and go after our dreams in other areas of our lives," Hamilton says.

"Full participation and integration into society is what all people want, whether in a wheelchair or not," Fisher concurs.

Crawford came up with the idea for these women to join forces in DTD. The "chairwomen" came together with these objectives:

- To banish stereotypes of women with disabilities
- To celebrate the accomplishments of women with disabilities

- To promote unbiased treatment
- To raise funds for women's healthcare initiatives and spinal-cord-injury research

"We have the same needs as able-bodied women for beauty, adventure, achievement, and respect—in short, for well-lived lives," says Crawford.

Dorsett adds, "We're all winners when perceptions shift from disability to ability."

The Roll Models—Michelle Boardman; Melissa Holley; Rosemarie Rossetti, PhD; and Jenny Smith—exemplify that philosophy. Amid a blaze of lights and high-tempo music, on February 6 they traveled down the Rolling with Style runway in highly customized couture wheelchairs. The manual chairs were Quickie Ti models. One of the Roll Models and one of the Chairwomen used power chairs.

"We want to demonstrate that women in wheelchairs are fashionable and can achieve anything through determination and perseverance," Hamilton says.

Each fashion designer had four traditional models preceding the Roll Models on the runway. The opening music's powerful, pulsating beat added drama to the evening. Participants backstage watched the show on the large screen.



Roll Model Michelle Boardman hits the runway in a knee-length pencil skirt by Baby Phat. Her chair has an animal-print seat.





U.S. Army SFC Diane Cochran receives the “Rolling with Style” award as 2006 Miss Universe Zuleyka Rivera applauds the recognition.

### Personal Achievers

Born with multiple heart defects, **Boardman** (Harleysville, Penn.) underwent corrective surgery at age 3, but degeneration continued. By age 12 she had lost the ability to walk. When she was 16, doctors diagnosed limb girdle muscular dystrophy type 21.

The diagnosis gave her a keen interest in genetics, and outstanding grades led to an Arcadia University four-year Distinguished Honors Academic Scholarship for studies in biology and psychology. She is preparing to enter the field of pediatric genetic counseling. “I have always dreamed of helping people,” she says, “to share what I have been through and inspire others to reach their full potential, no matter what their situation.”

Boardman loves fashion and creating her own style: “The way I dress and the impression I leave with people is very important to me. I try to create an everyday lifestyle image that’s simple, sexy, and classic.”

Designer Kimora Lee Simmons (“Baby Phat”) dressed Boardman in a knee-length pencil skirt with ruffling at its hemline. The Baby Phat symbol was embroidered in silver stitching on the skirt’s lower left side. Boardman wore a halter top with ruffling on the V-neck, and her short-waisted black jacket had detailing on the cuffs. A nine-inch Baby Phat “cat” was embroidered on the back. Her black patent-leather stiletto heels sported single small buckles.

Boardman shares DTD’s passion for research and hopes the fund-raising fashion event will result in “increased public awareness of women with disabilities so that doors will open and support will improve.”

**Smith** has been a support-group leader, pageant contestant, and globetrotter. The Louisville, Ky., resident now has added another title to her long list of credentials and accomplishments: runway model.

“Style says something without saying a word—independent, pretty, athletic, girly,” Smith says. “As a chair user, I think it’s important to have a strong positive first impression so those people who might otherwise be intimidated by a chair will see *me* in the chair.”

Her designer was Zang Toi, who created a silk knee-length dress for her. The print was full-bloomed red roses on a black background. The Quickie P222-SE wheelchair was black, and its cushion and backrest were covered in the same fabric as the dress.

Smith believes women with SCI could benefit from more education and greater awareness from the medical community.

“I don’t think I was fully informed about a lot of issues after my injury, so education is vital,” she says. “I’ve also heard of problems relating to mammograms and gynecologists, and hopefully getting physicians and hospitals to at least think about these issues is the first step toward seeing changes.”

Smith says she has been “freed” by a wheelchair, not “confined.” A gymnast from age 3, she



Rosemary Rossetti, PhD, shows off her chic Quickie GTX manual chair and matching couture outfit by Dorie Wishmyer of St. John.



Marc Bouwer designed a striking black velvet gown for Roll Model Melissa Holley (right). Her chair sports faux-leather upholstery. "Chairwoman" Julia Dorsett wears a full-length dress with a flare at the bottom.

was outdoors practicing tumbling at age 16 when her feet slipped on wet grass. She sustained a complete C6–7 SCI.

Since then, she has earned bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology, taught English to immigrants and refugees, and competed in the 1998 Ms. Wheelchair America Pageant. She also enjoys tennis, rugby, rowing, and working in her new home.

Smith also works for The Mobility Project and has distributed more than 1,000 wheelchairs to people with disabilities throughout Mexico, Costa Rica, and Afghanistan.

"A wheelchair may accompany me on my adventures, but it does not determine my future," she says. "I continue to push the limits

because I have the freedom of mobility that allows me to."

**Holley**, of Nashville, is a sought-after speaker, medical pioneer, and outspoken advocate for spinal-cord research.

"Style and fashion are just one way I express my personality and self-confidence as a capable and beautiful woman," she explains. "Regardless of disability, I am first and foremost a woman who has a desire to uniquely express herself."

Holley wore a black velvet gown designed by Marc Bouwer. It was full-length and featured a criss-cross strap with two crystal brooches on each shoulder. Her Quickie GT wheelchair had a glossy black finish and faux-leather upholstery.

# Adaptive-clothing Resources

While not every provider of adaptive clothing produces couture items like those created by the Rolling with Style designers, many companies offer a variety of items to help with daily living. Following are only a few of the resources available:

## Ableapparel

Bibs, clothing protectors, winter and rain ponchos, thumbless mittens  
516-873-6552 / sales@ableapparel.com / www.ableapparel.com

## Creative Designs

Handi-Robe (hooded terrycloth)  
800-335-4852 / robes4you@aol.com / www.robesh4you.com

## Easy Access Clothing

Variety of items for children and adults  
800-775-5536 / info@easyaccessclothing.com /  
www.easyaccessclothing.com

## Epiphany Designs

Outerwear for wheelchair and scooter users  
888-410-2243 (toll-free) / 416-410-2243 /  
josephross@epiphanydesign.ca / www.epiphanydesign.ca

## Fashions for Special Needs

Wheelchair jeans and cords, ponchos, open-back clothing, and side-open and seatless pants  
866-631-1200 / gzawaly@niagara.com / www.fashionsforspecialneeds.com

## Forde's Functional Fashions

Winter ponchos, rain ponchos, capes, lap warmers, wheelchair bags, clothing protectors, and more  
800-531-7705 / 305-757-5447 / fashion@fordes.com / www.fordes.com

## jjMarketing, Inc.

Produces directory of adaptive products, including clothing  
www.blvd.com

## Kutaways Coats

Coats, hats, and mitts for wheelchair users  
905-666-5823 / www.kutaways.com

## Specially For You, Inc.

Custom designer and manufacturer of children's apparel, sleepwear, and men's and women's clothing  
605-765-9396 / speciallyforyou@venturecomm.net /  
www.speciallyforyou.net

## USA Wheelchair Jeans

Pants designed for wheelchair users  
800-935-5170 / www.wheelchairjeans.com

## YouCan TooCan

Janska EasyWear jacket, LapWrap shawl  
888-663-9396 / 303-759-9938 (fax) / www.youcantoocan.com



The wheel hubs featured brooches that covered their centers and matched the gown's design.

After completing her first year of college and while working two summer jobs, Holley found her world turned upside down in 2000 when a traffic accident left her paraplegic. Faced with the choice between rehabilitating with no chance of recovery or being the first to undergo an untried procedure a half world away, she made the decision she says has "made all the difference." She underwent experimental macrophage spinal-cord treatment in Tel Aviv, Israel.

While she says the pioneering treatment has helped her make a "significant" recovery, she still uses a wheelchair. She has worked diligently to bring the Israeli procedure to the U.S.

"I have discovered that there is a marked difference between living *with* this injury and living *despite* this injury," Holley says. "Knowing where I have been, I am very proud of where I am."

"Looking your best is important in the business world," says **Rossetti** (Columbus, Ohio), an internationally known speaker, award-winning entrepreneur, and nationally syndicated columnist. "Women in wheelchairs want to be accepted for our message and not dismissed because of the way we look. People with disabilities should be perceived as capable individuals."

Dorie Wishmyer of St. John designed Rossetti's chic gold-and-periwinkle blue Quickie GTX manual wheelchair and matching couture jacket, slacks, shell, shoes, laptop bag, and purse. "The gold chain that circled the two wheelchair handrims was interwoven with ribbons of periwinkle suede that matched the covers on the seat cushion and wheelchair back," Rossetti explains. "The same chain adorned the laptop bag, purse, and jacket. I later found that the chain and buttons on the jacket were dipped in 24-karat gold!

"I looked across the audience as I slowly rolled down the center of the runway and stopped at the end to pause, then rotated the wheelchair to showcase the laptop bag hanging on the back of the chair."

Prior to the freak accident that left her paraplegic, Rossetti enjoyed good health, a loving family, a beautiful home, a successful career, and



Chairwomen Marilyn Hamilton (right) and Ashley Lauren Fisher are two of the moving forces behind the Rolling with Style Gala.

many friends. But during a bicycle ride in 1998, a 3½-ton tree crushed her, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down.

Through two years of therapy, she wondered what life would hold. Gradually, the answer began to form: She had to do more than just survive. She had to create a life that reflected her passion for life.

Rossetti founded her speaking, training, and consulting company and began to travel the country. She received numerous prestigious awards, wrote books, and was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Ohio 2004.

Rossetti and her husband Mark Leder are trying to change the building industry by creating a national demonstration home, the Universal Design Living Laboratory, in metropolitan Columbus. The facility will show how to create a more comfortable and accessible living environment.

Rossetti believes being a Roll Model allows her to be a catalyst for change. “I want to help people understand that women with disabilities have abilities and are valuable members of the global community,” she says.

### Mission Accomplished

For everyone involved, the evening was worth the three years of planning. The goal was to raise \$1 million.

Rossetti sums it up: “It was one over-the-top experience!”

**Contact:** DTD, [www.discoverythroughdesign.org](http://www.discoverythroughdesign.org). ■

*PN* and the Paralyzed Veterans of America do not endorse products or services.