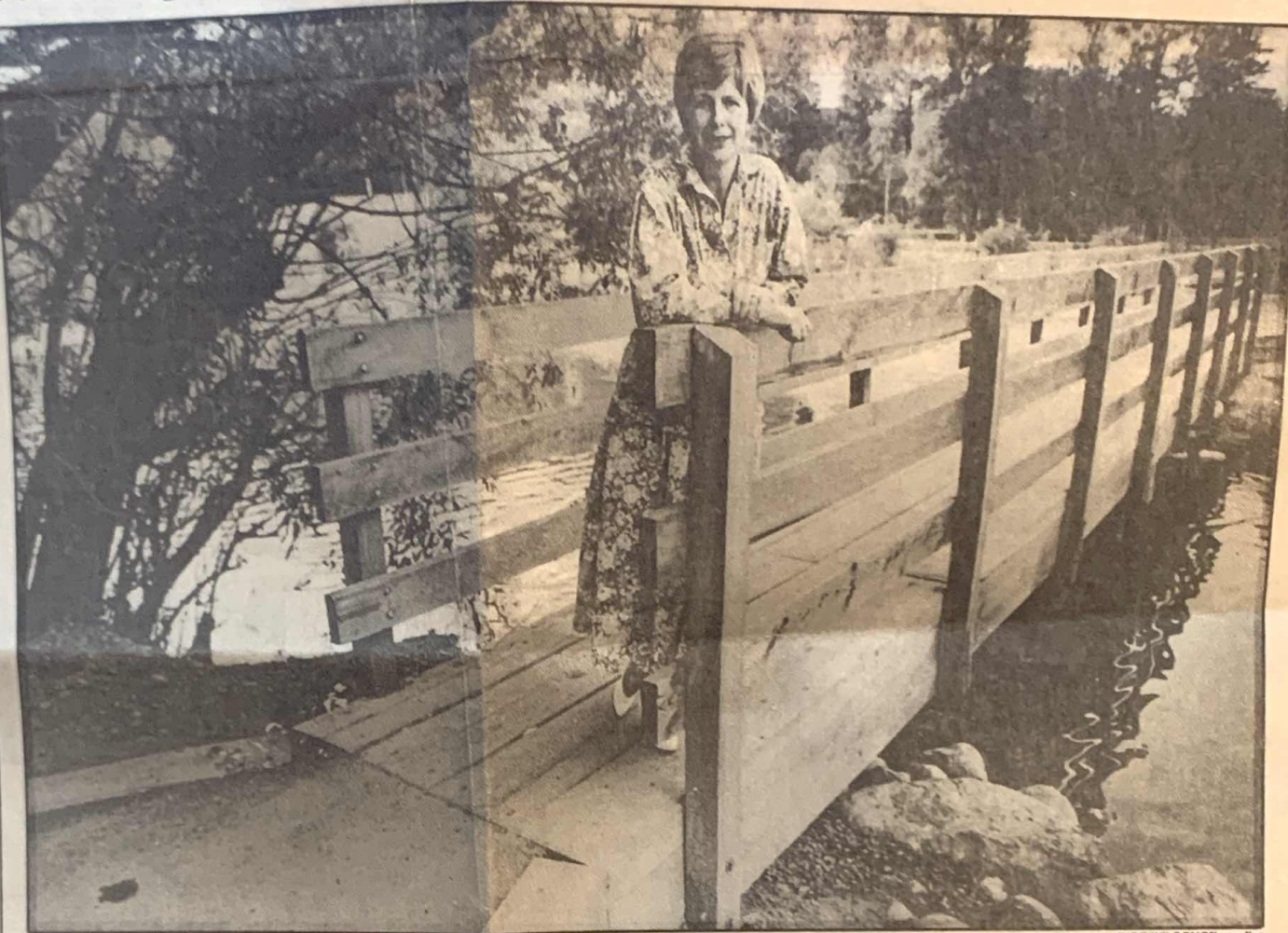


# A Kalispell DREAM comes true



KURT WILSON/MISSOULIAN

The Disabled Recreation and Environmental Access Movement, of which Dottie Maitland is president, was instrumental in making

part of Woodland Park in Kalispell wheelchair accessible by remodeling footbridges and paving the paths.

## Opening doors to the outdoors

By **PATTY ARMSTRONG**  
for the Missoulian

### A new guidebook examines Flathead accessibility issues

**K**ALISPELL — Four years ago, Dottie Maitland was asked to put together a vacation itinerary for a woman with cerebral palsy. The experience opened her eyes.

Maitland, the owner of Maitland Travel Services, finally managed to provide her client with a travel package that included Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park.

But she learned a lesson: "I learned we have a lot in this area that is not accessible to people with disabilities," she said. And she felt compelled to do more to make the valley more accessible to the handicapped.

From this experience was born the Disabled Recreation and Environmental Access Movement (DREAM); Maitland now serves as president.

The group's primary purpose, she said, is to educate people about accessibility issues.

Although the 3-year-old non-profit organization has no paid staff and operates on a shoestring budget, according to Maitland, its

reputation is reaching across the country. This is thanks to the "Glacier Park-Flathead Valley Accessibility Guide to Undiscovered Montana," released for the first time last month.

The guide furnishes accessibility information about business and recreational opportunities. Businesses were asked to participate in the guide by providing information about their facilities and services available to the handicapped. More than 100 responses came in and appear in the guide.

The handbook uses symbols to provide information on features such as accessibility of restrooms, entrances and parking. The second section of the book lists national recreational opportunities, parks, transportation and scheduled events. Services and facilities pertinent to the handicapped are highlighted. The overview of the events and places is brief, but thorough enough to be of use

even to the non-handicapped.

The guide's information is reliable, Maitland said, because "every listing was checked out personally by a handicapped individual." The only problem is that the guide — although it's only about 1 month old — is already a little out of date.

The community's response has been overwhelming, Maitland said, adding that many of the businesses and groups that did not initially reply to the poll have since contacted DREAM wanting to know what they can do to make themselves more accessible.

"People were not insulted to learn their place was not accessible, but they wanted to know what changes they can make to accommodate the disabled," she said.

While some changes in facilities can be expensive, many are not. In order to keep pace with the positive response, Maitland

said DREAM hopes the guide will be updated annually, money permitting.

The first edition was possible through grant money from Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States and the Burlington Northern Foundation. Professional services and support from Northwest Montana Human Resources and the Flathead Association for Retarded Citizens were also crucial to compiling and printing the guide, according to Maitland.

Meanwhile, word of the guide has spread, and groups from all over the country are asking how they can do something similar in their own communities, Maitland said.

Copies of the guide are being distributed nationally through the United States Travel and Tourism offices and worldwide through the Department of Commerce. They're also available through Montana's state travel office.

Maitland said she expects a fringe benefit of the guide will be to bring more tourism and businesses to the area.

"It shows everyone that we are thinking ahead to the future."