

Parking lot blues

Volunteers to patrol handicap parking

By Heidi Bell
Journal Staff Writer

Handicap parking isn't for people who have trouble parking.

That's the caption on a cartoon that gently gets its message across: Handicap spots are only for people with physical disabilities.

The cartoon is pictured on yellow parking violation "tickets" Rapid City motorists will soon be finding on their windshields if they park in handicap spots.

Last week, the Rapid City Council formally approved a pilot program that will train volunteers to issue citations for vehicles illegally parked in handicap zones.

"Our goal for this whole program is not to go out and give mass numbers of tickets," said Shelly Schock, outreach/advocacy coordinator for Western Resources for dis-abled Independence (WRDI). "We're trying to educate people."

The WRDI staff has worked with city community development Director

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Journal photo by Dick Kettlewell



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Shelly Schock demonstrates the amount of space handicapped people need to get in and out of their vehicles.

Volunteers soon will "ticket" nonhandicapped drivers who park in spaces marked with these signs.

Ticket: Fine \$25

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Bonnie Hughes to make parking easier for Rapid City's handicapped residents. Higher fines were considered, Schock said, "(But) this was the main one that they jumped on."

The plan calls for volunteers to be trained by the Rapid City Police Department. For three months, they will issue reminder "tickets." The tickets explain that the person is either parked in a space reserved for the handicapped, or that his or her vehicle is blocking a wheelchair ramp.

"If you are not handicapped, your future consideration by not blocking spaces like this would be greatly appreciated," the ticket reads.

Letters will be mailed soon to local businesses, explaining the program and what kind of handicap parking is required by law.

Starting in May, volunteers will issue real parking tickets. The city's handicap parking ordinance carries a \$25 fine. If not paid on time, fines can go as high as \$100.

Gillette, Wyo., has used a similar program for about a year. Volunteers patrol parking lots and streets. If they see a violation, they take Polaroid photographs for proof.

Volunteers then complete an affidavit of what they saw. If a judge agrees there was a violation, the vehicle's owner gets a letter.

The letters note that the vehicle was parked illegally and asks that a \$50 fine be paid. The owner may protest the ticket.

"To the best of my knowledge, since we have instituted this program

we have not had anyone take a particular citation to court," said Lt. No-land Peacock of the Gillette Police Department, adding that it's hard to argue with a photograph. "It's been an effective program here."

Most problems seem to occur in private parking lots where city officers don't routinely patrol. Before Gillette started its volunteer program, Peacock said, "We were spending a considerable amount of time responding to these types of calls."

They don't get as many calls anymore. "I think that the public has become more aware of the reasons why they should not park in a handicapped parking zone," Peacock said.

Anyone interested in helping to enforce Rapid City's handicap parking policy can call Schock at 394-1930.