

Dear Mr. Lore:

As president of a large company, you probably get letters of complaint for one reason or another. This is just the opposite.

I am a polio survivor, aged 57, co-founder of a successful investment banking firm, and active father and well traveled around the globe. In the past couple of years, my past-polio syndrome has greatly limited my ability to walk, even with crutches. The Chevrolet Suburbans with rear lifts for my scooter (which I have used for many years) were no longer practical because I was falling when getting back to the scooter. Gradually, I was losing my independence because I had to have someone bring the scooter to the driver's door.

A couple of years ago, your company purchased Gary Melton's Paradapt Services here in Richmond. I had been dealing with them for years and, after the name changed to Ride-Away, I got to know Paul Tumelaire, a sales consultant. Paul showed me how Suburbans could work but my condition dictated that I get a van with a ramp or lift and a transfer seat. For many people, the solution at that point may have been simple. Not in this case, however.

First, although I am only six feet tall, I am long-bodied with short legs because of the polio. The regular Chrysler and Toyota conversions had insufficient height for me riding my Pride Victory scooter. I could not exit the driver's door on a full-sized van because of the height. I still use the driver's door at my home and office.

Second, my partners and I purchased two historic office buildings in 1999, which have an elevator that goes to parking in the basement, making it extremely convenient for me. Unfortunately, the ramp is steep and a mini-van with a lowered floor scraped at the top of the ramp and the full-sized vans were too tall to park downstairs.

Finally, I did not give up my large, comfortable Suburban gracefully, especially with the alternative being a mini-van. The thought was repulsive. My wife said I was pouting but, if you travel as much as I do, the Suburban is safe and comfortable plus a joy to use at our beach house on Chesapeake Bay.

Paul would not give up. He kept searching for alternatives. The Chevrolet Uplander offered the ten inch dropped floor, but would not go down my ramp. Besides, I wanted leather seats and every option available.

Paul kept working and found a fully-equipped Buick Terraza. He then did further work with local auto shops to get special lifts put on the van so I would go into my office's basement parking area. I won't pretend to know how it works but before I enter or leave my parking area, I hit a button on the dash and in a few moments, I have adequate clearance.

He even worked to get the paperwork done so I qualified for the General Motor's "same price as their employees pay" promotion in late September. Braun dropped the floor, the transfer seat was installed by your shop here (Russell and your other people here are top notch, too), and I took delivery in November.

Every day I get more comfortable with my new van, and it is approaching 4,000 miles already. I have my independence back and can go wherever I want alone, without having to rely on others.

Thank you for having people like Paul Tumelaire that can help those of us that are facing challenges get through with respect and comfort that we are doing the right thing.

I now consider Paul a close friend, too.

Please be assured that when folks ask me where I got the van (often as I emerge on the van's ramp), I send them to Ride-Away.

Sincerely,
Wallace W. E., Jr.