

# Accessible Treehouse Builder Wins 2011 Paralyzed Veterans' Barrier-Free America Award

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*James Roth of The Treehouse Guys Honored for Network of Universally Accessible Treehouses Across the Nation*

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- James Roth, cofounder of The Treehouse Guys (formerly Forever Young Treehouses), is the 2011 recipient of Paralyzed Veterans of America's Barrier-Free America Award. Roth, through his company, has built 34 universally accessible treehouses in private camps and public parks across the country. John Connell, the architect behind the first prototype designs received honorable mention for his work.

"It's an honor to be recognized by Paralyzed Veterans of America for our work," Roth said. "It's been a dream for us

to build these accessible treehouses so that everyone, no matter their physical ability, can experience the joy of what it's like to 'climb' and be at the top of a treehouse."

"An accessible treehouse sends an important message to other architects when it comes to accessibility—to think big, and think 'out of the box' when it comes to designing accessible buildings and structures," said Mark Lichter, AIA, Paralyzed Veterans' director of Architecture. "Accessible design benefits not only people with disabilities, but everyone in the community—something Roth and his company have demonstrated through their work."

Highlights of the award-winning accessible treehouses include:

- **The universally accessible ramp system** that makes getting to the top of the treehouse easy and enjoyable. The gradual ascent to the treehouse is an accessible pleasure for everyone, with great views and rest stops along the way.
- **The creation of an all-inclusive structure** that allows people of all ages and physical abilities to enjoy the treehouse together. In the past a treehouse would have been off-limits to people with disabilities, or the elderly, who may have limited mobility. Now it's something that everyone no matter their ages or abilities can enjoy.
- **The important message that an accessible treehouse sends to architects**—that the sky's the limit when it comes to making our nation more accessible.

Over the past eleven years, Roth has designed and built over 34 universally accessible treehouses in 18 states across the country, and in rural Poland. Roth was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he studied landscape architecture at Michigan State University, and fine arts at Johnson State College. Upon finishing college, he discovered the Yestermorrow design/build school in Warren, Vermont, where he has taught since the mid-80's.

The Treehouse Guys is a partnership of James Roth and Chris Haake, along with an assorted cast of craftsmen. The two started building treehouses in the fall of 2000 for the nonprofit organization Forever Young Treehouses. Eleven years later, the two have branched out to form The Treehouse Guys, LLC, based in Warren, VT. To learn more about The Treehouse Guys or to view locations of the accessible treehouses located in various private camps and public parks throughout the United States, go to [www.treehouses.org](http://www.treehouses.org).

With undergraduate studies in both chemistry and fine arts at the University of Pennsylvania, John Connell—this year's honorable mention winner—went on to attend architecture school at Yale University, where he initially experienced the design/build concept. This idea of shepherding an architectural vision by staying fully involved with the construction was to become his calling card. In 1980 he moved to Vermont, where he opened Yestermorrow to

teach nonprofessionals how to design and build their own green, personally expressive homes. Since then, the school has thrived. Connell has also written several books, edited a magazine, hosted a television series and started two other design organizations. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that Connell's name would come up when Forever Young Treehouses, was looking for someone to design and build the first few prototypes of accessible treehouses.

The Barrier-Free America Award, established in 2001, honors and promotes leadership, innovation and action in the architectural and design communities in advancing accessibility—an advance that improves quality of life for everyone. Through their work, architects and designers play an extremely important role in removing the barriers that people with disabilities face everywhere, every day. Previous recipients of the award include architect Cesar Pelli for his accessible design of Washington Reagan National Airport; Bob Vila for educating the public about the importance of accessible design solutions through his television show; Marca Bristo, president and CEO of Access Living, for the organization's Chicago-based headquarters; architect Antoine Predock for Milwaukee's Indian Community school; and CBT Architects for its work to make the John Adams Courthouse in Boston universally accessible.

Paralyzed Veterans' Architecture program seeks to promote an accessible, barrier-free environment, advocating for accessible design in architecture and construction industries, helping to develop building codes and standards for the entire nation and serving on federal advisory committees to further define Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. These standards and laws extend beyond veterans rights; they benefit everyone.

### **About Paralyzed Veterans of America:**

Sixty-five years ago Paralyzed Veterans of America was founded by a band of spinal cord injured service members who returned home from World War II to a grateful nation—but also to a world with few solutions to the challenges they faced. These veterans from the "Greatest Generation" made a decision not just to live, but to live with dignity as contributors to society. They created an organization dedicated to veterans service, medical research and civil rights for people with disabilities. And for more than six decades, Paralyzed Veterans of America and its 34 chapters have been working to create an America where all veterans and people with disabilities, and their families, have everything they need to thrive. [www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)

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