As I look ahead, I see vast opportunities for Accessible Space to fulfill its mission—and some challenges.

We’ve always held fast to our commitment to people with physical disabilities and mobility impairments, but over the years we’ve incrementally expanded the populations we serve. First we added options for people with brain injuries. Then seniors. Then veterans. Because we believe that everyone should have a place to live, ASI seeks to expansively—and creatively—meet that need.
A Commitment to Veterans
We've made great strides in housing veterans in the last few years, and we will continue seeking opportunities to develop dignified, comfortable homes for them as funding allows. Potential residents include veterans of past wars, veterans who are now seniors and more recent veterans returning home injured or paralyzed. All of these populations are growing.

While the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides rental assistance vouchers to eligible veterans through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH), it does not provide the capital needed to build our housing. That's where ASI steps in. It's our niche.

Our current funding option—Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)—moves slowly. We often wait two to three years for funding awards due to the incredible demand and competition. The larger award amounts, however, mean our developments can be better funded, with more amenities. Take a look at recent ASI developments specifically created for veterans, Patriot Place Apartments and Allegiance Apartments in Las Vegas. They are beautiful homes for our nation’s veterans who deserve the best when it comes to accessible, affordable “housing with care.”

Challenges to ASI’s Shared Service/Assisted Living Model
ASI’s shared service/assisted living model has, from the start of services in September 1980, been one of our distinguishing features. To receive much-needed 24/7 coverage, ASI residents share their limited service hours and have access to assistance around the clock—i.e., when they need it rather than during a short, set period of time.

Currently, ASI and other organizations seeking to hire and retain direct caregivers are facing a crisis. There’s been no increase in the Minnesota waiver rates that support ASI’s assisted living model for five-and-a-half years. It’s a harsh reality, especially since—unlike other assisted living providers—all of ASI residents receiving 24/7 services are on these waivers. There are no private pay or third party payors driving a higher reimbursement. ASI’s independent living model of choice and exclusive position in affordable housing serves those most in need of assisted living service, but it brings with it a 100% financial dependency on the waivers.

Given the incredibly tight labor market, especially in Minnesota, it has become much more difficult to employ the Resident Assistants who perform important supportive services for our residents. Accessible Space has increased pay a number of times over the past years—but it doesn’t seem likely that we will be able to keep up with inflation increases and the demands created by a very competitive labor market simply by vigilantly managing expenses. The next few months and through 2020, as well as into 2021 will be dedicated to finding a solution to this critical issue. If that solution requires tweaking our shared service model, we will stay true to our founding mission of choice, self-reliance and accessible, affordable living options. Always.

The Magic of our Benefactors
Whatever opportunities we undertake or challenges we face, fundraising is key. It will help us cover what the government is not and close the gap on skyrocketing construction costs. In the years ahead, we hope to win new relationships with kind private benefactors and encourage deeper connections with current good-hearted donors.

As we accomplish these tasks, we renew our commitment to our mission and to our valued consumers. They’re why we do what we do.

Stephen Vander Schaaf
President/CEO