

# Wheeler dealers lead for disabled

■ By **ANDREW BELFORD**

*Business reporter*

**SOUTH** Essex businesses struggling to make themselves more welcoming to disabled customers in time for a looming Government clampdown can now call on the help of two experts.

With the Disability Discrimination Act set to impose a legal obligation on all businesses dealing with the public to make their premises accessible to disabled people by 2004, Paul Houghton and Aindre Reece-Sheerin are ideally placed to advise on what needs to be done.

Canvey resident Paul and Aindre, from Southend, are access auditors, trained and qualified to check premises and report on what "reasonable adjustments" need to be made to make them accessible for people with disabilities – and they are both disabled themselves.

Paul's right leg was amputated 15 months ago after it became infected by the flesh-eating bug nectrotizing fasciitis, while Aindre has been confined to a wheelchair since a motorcycle accident



■ **Essex first – access auditors Aindre Reece-Sheerin and Paul Houghton**

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eight years ago. They have just completed a revolutionary pilot course at Chelmsford College – the first of its kind in the UK – designed to help disabled people to use their experience to gain full-time work as access auditors, either with architects or on a self-employed basis.

The pair will shortly become the first Essex residents ever to be recognised by the National Register of

Access Consultants, and plan to set up on their own.

Aindre said: "We have had a very positive response from business so far, they are very keen to change.

"Disability is not something that's going to go away, it's actually increasing, and we can help businesses facilitate those people.

"People like me should be able to go into a restaurant, say, and have a meal just like

anyone else. We want to get away from disabled people being considered victims. We are not victims. I pay tax, like everyone else, I obey the same laws as everyone else so why should we be treated differently?"

Any business interested in contacting Paul or Aindre for help can e-mail them on

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accessauditor.fsnet.co.uk  
or paul@plan-a.fsnet.co.uk.