

## And freedom for all

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Terry Freeman (from left), Paul Williams, Horizon House support staffers Adam Mize and Jennifer Pittman, and Claude Stacey cheer for better state treatment of the developmentally disabled during the Freedom Quest '09 rally Tuesday afternoon. The group makes up part of the 10 local representatives who are joining more than 100 other disabled people and advocates traveling to Springfield over the next couple days to further their cause.

*NewsTribune photo/Amanda Whitlock*

Their voices may, at times, be difficult to understand, but the message coming from the developmentally disabled community in the Illinois Valley and around the state is clear: equality and freedom now.

Hundreds of local disabled people and their advocates met in the parking lot of Peru Eagle's Club on Tuesday afternoon to rally support for their cause and Freedom Quest '09. Inspired by Civil Rights freedom rides of the 1960s, advocacy groups Illinois Voices and Campaign for Real Choices organized the Freedom Quest, which enlisted groups throughout the state to send members of the disabled community to Springfield to lobby legislators, particularly a couple pieces of legislation intended to redesign the way the state supports people with disabilities.

“We need to be the squeaky wheels to representative (Frank) Mautino (D-Spring Valley) and senator (Gary) Dahl (R-Granville),” said Mary Hettel of Ottawa, who will be joining

the freedom ride to Springfield.

The day went beyond politics, though.

“What’s more important is for people with disabilities to know their voices matter,” said Jennifer Knapp, an event organizer with Campaign for Real Choices.

Similarly, local advocates for the disabled said there are bigger issues than just persuading legislators, which is why the rally was so important.

“It’s more important for us to communicate to the community what the issues are,” said Horizon House director of supports and services Dan Fitzgerald.