



SPINAL COURIER

The spinal cord disability information source for Arkansans since 1989

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Arkansas Spinal Cord Foundation receives Craig H. Neilsen Foundation Grant

The Craig H. Neilsen Foundation of Twin Falls, Idaho announced on November 23rd, 2009 a grant award of \$66,500 to the Arkansas Spinal Cord Foundation (ASCF) for the Hope for Mobility Project. This project will help purchase wheelchairs for clients injured in 2009 or 2010.

ASCC Case Managers will coordinate the wheelchair evaluations and purchases. The project will run from January 1 to December 31, 2010 and will serve up to 20 newly injured ASCC clients with spinal

cord injuries. These funds will augment the services presently provided by the Spinal Cord Commission. "We are very excited about this grant," stated ASCF Vice President John Wyrick, "This grant provides funds to truly make a difference in the lives of newly injured Arkansans and provide them with personal mobility to allow them to live as independently as they can."

The Craig H. Neilsen Foundation was established in 2003 to provide funding to cure spinal cord injuries. They also fund programs that sup-

port the lives of people with spinal cord injuries.

The Arkansas Spinal Cord Foundation is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization established in 2004. The mission of the Arkansas Spinal Cord Foundation is to promote the health, wellbeing and quality of life of Arkansans with spinal cord disabilities. The Foundation's goal is to raise funds to support programs and services to improve the lives of Arkansans with spinal cord disabilities.

ASCC Case Manager Dee Welsh Retires

After nearly eighteen years of service, Dee Welsh retired from the Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission on December 31, 2009. Dee had been employed in the Little Rock office since 1992. Starting her career as a secretary, Dee gradually worked her way up to Case Manager, a position she had held for the last three years.

Dee had a eye for detail which served her well when she was coeditor of the *Spinal Courier* and maintained the agency's client registry. She also was a good listener and had a genuine compassion for her clients that will certainly be missed. She was dedicated to meeting the needs of her clients and often went the extra mile to provide services for her clients.



Dee Welsh at her retirement party.

Dee's retirement plans include spending more time with friends and family, reading, volunteering and traveling in the U.S. She also plans to maintain her involvement in the Little Rock arts community.

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SPINAL COURIER

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With Thanks

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ASCC accepts tax-deductible donations which assists our clients.

From the Director

In Memory
Sandy Turner
October 12, 1948 – December 2, 2009



Loss of someone you care about is always difficult, but when I learned that Commission Member Sandy Turner had lost her battle with breast cancer on December 2nd, I was devastated. I had spoken with her a couple weeks before and she was doing well, she was headed out to play bridge and looking forward to the holidays. She died in her sleep days after spending the thanksgiving holiday with her family and friends. Despite her true Southern Belle demeanor, Sandy was a fighter. She fought back to live after her spinal cord injury in a car crash in 1994 and later survived two bouts of septicemia. Unfortunately, the stage 4 breast cancer was a formidable foe. But, she did not let it get her down. As her daughter Withers noted, when Sandy called to tell her about the diagnosis, Withers was in tears. Sandy told her not to worry adding, “Well, I’m not going to sit here and cry for the rest of my life.” And she didn’t!

Less than a year after her injury, in January of 1995, Governor Jim Guy Tucker appointed Sandy to the Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission. She was reappointed in 2005 by Governor Mike Huckabee making her one of the longest serving members in the history of our Commission.

Sandy served the Commission well. Her positive attitude provided support to me and to the Commission over the years. “Cheryl, you just don’t worry about that, you are doing a good job,” she’d tell me, even in the worst of times. The fact that she knew so many people through her experience as producer of Channel 7’s ‘Seven on Your Side’ before her injury and her huge network of friends made it easy for her to say “just call.....” when we had a need or a problem.

In 2004, under Sandy’s term as Chair, the Commission members decided that we needed a private, not-for-profit foundation to allow us to receive private grants and funds. Sandy was again our motivator, serving as President of the Arkansas Spinal Cord Foundation until her death. She read every grant application and letter of request and offered suggestions and wording changes before she signed them. No one was happier than Sandy when we got a grant. Though she had resources to cover her own spinal cord related expenses, she ‘fought’ to find resources for those who did not.

The Commission, our Foundation, our staff and I personally will miss Sandy Turner. In her quiet, private way, she has had a great impact on the lives of innumerable Arkansans with spinal cord disabilities, most of whom she never met.

Rest in Peace, my friend.

Cheryl L. Vines

2009 Spina Bifida Conference a Success

Over 150 people attended the 2009 ASCC *Spina Bifida Fall Family Fest* on October 24th at Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock to make the conference a great success.

Parents listened to informative speakers, visited with vendors about new equipment and got a chance to share experiences with other parents. The older teens were very interested in the learning to drive session. The kids, meanwhile, had the opportunity to decorate pumpkins, play wheelchair basketball and bean-bag toss, cook s'mores, take a hike through the woods and go fishing.

Pictured are a few of the conference participants and door prize winners.



Cartoons were enjoyed by all in the conference room day care center.



John Johnston, OTRL, spoke about learning to drive with spina bifida.



The kids enjoyed fishing from the dock.



Seibert Mobility demonstrated an accessible van.



Cheryl Vines presents Arkansas Traveler awards to speakers Dr. Margaret Stran (l) and Jean Driscoll (r).



Central AR Corvette Club presented a check to the SB Support Group.



Bobby Norwood won the Arkansas Razorback autographed football.



Wanda Stovall spoke about being an educational advocate for your child.



Everyone enjoyed decorating pumpkins.



J'Nevelyn Blackmon won the Wii.

Living Well with SCI: Numbers, 8 and 7

By Tom Kiser, M.D., ASCC Medical Director

At the annual spinal cord injury conference in Little Rock this year, the focus was “Living Well with Spinal Cord Injury.” I was asked to give a brief presentation on my recommendations for “Living Well” from the medical and rehabilitation perspective, prior to a panel discussion on the same topic.

Many attendees requested a list of the ten items I presented, so we decided to publish the list, here, in the Courier and provide a more in-depth discussion of each recommendation. Due to *Courier* space constraints we’re presenting only one or two at a time in order to give justice to each recommendation. So here are numbers 8 and 7 of the “Ten things I encourage my patients to do!” I will be working toward number 1 in future *Courier* articles:

Number 8: Protect your Shoulders!

- Avoid the use of the overhead trapeze bar for the bed.
- Keep transfers as level as possible.
- Alternate the side you transfer to, since there is more force on the trailing, “pushing” arm.
- Plan your day to minimize transfers. Live as if you only have so many transfers, so use them wisely.

After a spinal cord injury, your shoulders become very important to your quality of life. The shoulder is designed for mobility and agility, unlike the hip which is designed for stability and strength. Since the shoulder depends on the rotator cuff

muscles for stability, it is important to use good shoulder techniques when doing a number of routine every day activities, such as turning in bed, sitting at the edge of the bed, transferring your body to other surfaces, and pushing your wheelchair.

Pulling on overhead objects such as a trapeze bar puts the supporting muscles of the shoulder (the rotator cuff) in a precarious situation, where they cannot properly keep the shoulder in good alignment. Pushing activities and below the shoulder activities place the rotator cuff in an advantageous position and result in the shoulder being pushed together instead of pulled apart. The trailing arm, or “push arm,” transmits most of the force to the shoulder on the same side, so try to alternate the direction in which you transfer. Just like rotating the tires on your car helps them last longer, alternating the sides will help your shoulders stay healthy. In other words, become ambidextrous in your transfers.

Any sudden tug or slip may cause damage to the muscles of the shoulder, and the resulting abnormal

movement pattern of the shoulder will eventually lead to shoulder joint arthritis. Once your shoulders are injured, your life and routine will change. A power wheelchair becomes a must for mobility, and a Hoyer lift may be needed for transfers. Work simplification, joint preservation, and thorough planning of your day to minimize transfers and avoid difficult transfers is well worth the extra effort.



ASCC Medical Director Tom Kiser, M.D.

You can also try to set up your bed, toilet, tub, car, etc. to maximize the number of transfers which are in a down hill direction. Sometimes this requires a hospital bed or seat elevator for your wheelchair, or at least setting it up so that your stronger arm or best shoulder is the trailing (push) arm for the most difficult transfers.

Number 7: Protect your Wrists and Hands!

- When possible, wear wheelchair push mitts.
- Minimize flat palms and extended wrists, when lifting during transfers. Use the edge of a mat or edge of a chair when transferring, or use a closed fist on a soft surface such as a bed.
- Consider a power wheelchair or power assist wheelchair, if wrist, hand or shoulder pain is not improving.

Wear wheelchair push mitts . . .

Your wrists and hands are at risk when you push a wheelchair or transfer with poor technique. The nerves and bones of the hand are in harm’s way when the wrist is placed in the extremes of flexion and extension, so it is important to grasp objects with a neutral wrist position when putting the weight of the body on See **Living Well** on page 5

Scholarships Available

The Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities scholarship applications are now available. The Arkansas Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities by promoting advocacy, educating, and creating independence and celebrating all of life. One of their key programs is their college scholarship program. These scholarships are funded, in part, from handicapped parking fines.

Scholarship applications for 2010 are due on February 28, 2010 and the scholarships will be awarded in late spring. Any Arkansan with a disability who is attending or planning to attend college may apply. According to Commission Executive Director Leonard Boyle, applications went out to high school counselors and college disability services offices in November. Applications may be obtained at arsinfo.org. For additional information, contact Mr. Boyle at **501-296-1637**.

Wheelchair Basketball Season Rolls

Wheelchair Basketball season is in full swing with four teams in Arkansas competing in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association this year. These include the Arkansas Rollin' Razorbacks in Championship Division, the Junior Rollin' Razorbacks in the Junior Prep Division and the Fort Smith Shooting Stars and Northwest Arkansas Wildwheels in Division III.

The Rollin' Razorbacks will host a Championship and Junior Division tournament on February 20-21, 2010 at the Harmon Recreation Center in Sherwood. The competition will be strong with top ten ranked Rollin' Razorbacks, Charlottesville Cardinals and Dallas Mavericks competing. The Junior tournament will include teams from Arkansas and Texas.

For the tournament schedule, check the ASCC website in early February, or call Coach Jared Johnson at 501-240-1529.

Living Well

Continued from page 4

your arm. This is especially important with transfers, but also important when pushing a wheelchair. Wearing a protective wheelchair mitt can protect the median nerve, in the carpal tunnel of the hand, from extremes of pressure and from repetitive trauma when pushing a wheelchair. If you are doing everything right, but are still having increased shoulder pain and problems with carpal tunnel syndrome and wrist pain, a power wheelchair or a power assist wheelchair should be considered. As with any decision, there are risks and benefits of power mobility. The downside risk is weight gain due to decreased activity and energy output required to move your wheelchair. The benefits of the power

wheelchair are decreased wear-and-tear on the shoulder and wrist and more energy for your daily routine. This benefit, however, can be lost if you gain weight, which will increase the forces through the shoulder, wrist and hand with transfers.

Therefore, it is important to assess diet, activity and weight management before making a big change in your method of mobility. You may need to consider an additional exercise routine to help burn calories, a change in food intake to eliminate calories, or both.

Living Well with SCI will continue in the next issue of the Spinal Courier. Editor.

Mothers Needed for Spina Bifida Research

The Spina Bifida Genetics Project is enrolling mothers in a study to determine if genetic variations in folic acid metabolism account for an increased risk of having a child with spina bifida. From the results of this study, it may be possible to develop a test that can identify at-risk women prior to conception. They could then be treated by their physicians the same way as women who have had a child with spina bifida—with high dose folic acid supplementation.



Participants in the study are asked to complete a brief online survey (www.sbgenetics.org) and provide a DNA sample using a simple at-home saliva collection kit. More information about the study is available at www.sbgenetics.org. The website and survey are available in both English and Spanish. Enrollment can also be done on the phone (**866-561-3538**).

Upon completion, participants may choose to receive a \$10 gift card or to have SB Genetics donate \$10 to the Spina Bifida Association. If the study results are positive, SB Genetics will provide complimentary versions of the test to participants.

The SB Genetics Research Project includes scientists from UC Berkeley, Stanford University, UC San Francisco, Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute and VitaPath Genetics.

Up Close and Personal: Jon Wilkerson

This is the fifth in a series of articles profiling the ASCC Commissioners.



Jon Wilkerson was thirty years old, a traveling Physical Therapist, seeing the country and working in different hospitals in 2006. He had just left an assignment in Boston and arrived in Seattle, Washington on June 21st when he took his mountain bike out for an evening ride in a park, took a jump, the bike rebounded and he went over the handlebars. Within seconds, before he lost consciousness, he assessed his injuries, knew he had a spinal cord injury and as he notes 'went through the five stages of grief,' not expecting to survive. When he was found the next morning, his body temperature was 70 degrees and his battle for life began. Over the next few months he had pneumonia 7 times, lost part of his lung, was placed on a ventilator and literally 'died' and was resuscitated more times than he can recall. Jon says weaning off of the ventilator was definitely the hardest thing he has ever done. He spent months in ICU in Seattle, then headed to Baylor Institute for Rehabilitation in Dallas for his rehabilitation, after two months there he arrived back home in Center Ridge, AR, only to face pneumonia and another two months in ICU. Surviving that first year was tough, but since then Jon has been on a positive path.

Born in Texas and raised in Atkins, Arkansas, Jon was an accomplished

athlete and scholar. He headed to the Honors College at University of Central Arkansas in 1993, completing a Bachelors degree in Health Sciences, followed by a Masters degree in Physical Therapy. Jon worked in clinical and rehabilitation management positions in several hospitals around Arkansas

when he chose to reevaluate his career path and head out on his travels.

Today, he still lives in Center Ridge, but is busy developing plans to build an accessible home in Conway Arkansas. He has taught
See **Wilkerson** on page 8

PROFILE:

Date And Place Of Birth: January 5, 1976, Freeport, Texas.

Family Members: Father, Louis and mother, Marti.

If I Did Not Live In Arkansas, I Would Want To Be: There's no telling. Before my accident, I had wanderlust. I've always wanted to live a while in Southern California though.

My Favorite Meal Is: After my accident and the six months it took me to resume a normal diet, I really, really wanted a calzone from Vino's and an oyster po' boy from the Oyster Bar. Those two would be way up there on the list.

My Favorite Movie Is: *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

My Favorite Song Is: "Rhapsody In Blue," George Gershwin.

Last Good Book I Read: *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell.

My Favorite Hobbies Are: I like to read a lot, like movies, and I listen to a lot of music. I'm a Razorback fan and I really like NFL football. Before my accident, I enjoyed health and fitness and I still exercise as much as I can.

My Favorite Saying: "He who is not busy being born is busy dying," Bob Dylan.

The Best Advice I Ever Received Was: Stay out of other people's business.

My Advice To The Newly Injured: Be a good advocate for yourself and be willing to accept help wherever you can find it.

The One Thing I Always Wanted To Do But Have Never Had The Chance Was: Travel South America.

One Word that Sums Me Up: Deadpan.

Pushing Back....

There is not one of us, who, somewhere along the way, have not been swept up in this whirlpool of life, pushed around and tossed out on our ear. But for a determined group of individuals in Northwest Arkansas, they are redefining the meaning of, "taking what life has to offer" and literally are pushing back.

This group of people can be found at Victory Walk, Inc. in Springdale, Arkansas. VWI is a non-profit spinal cord injury recovery center that opened its doors in April of 2009.

"Our goal," according VWI Director Lynda Lemke, "is to both give people with paralysis the benefit of getting the intensive exercise they need to strengthen their body and have a better quality of life, but we also want to make it more affordable." This is something that Director Lemke takes to heart because her son, Greg Lemke, is a quadriplegic who was injured in an accident in January of 2007. She not only understands the upheaval in one's life, she relates to it on a daily basis.

VWI offers one on one individualized intensive activity based training for people with SCI, and the trainers are educated in specific methods shown to work with people who follow a long term consistent program. Clients present all levels of injury (cervical, thoracic, and lumbar) and are in varied stages of recovery. VWI methods differ from traditional Physical Therapy by focusing on weight-bearing activities and providing stimulus to the body searching for a positive response.

VWI training is designed to incrementally reeducate the damaged nervous system to regain movement, increase function and

independence, and ultimately improve the lives of those living with paralysis. Socialization and camaraderie of the sessions also help to increase the overall well-being of the clients.

Clients attend intensive, full-body exercise therapy, for two hour sessions, two to three times a week. Supervised repetitions determine results in strength and independence. The center utilizes a standing frame machine to facilitate respiration, normalize bowel function, and increase circulation. An FES bike allows clients to with little or no voluntary leg movement to actively pedal a stationary bike. Inversion machines, floor/mat and table therapy as well as Nautical weight and Total Gym machines are also available.

"Activity based therapy at VWI is an individualized activity based therapy program that enables a client to "push their boundaries" and then identify what abilities can be recovered," said Lemke. "I want to stress that while clients may not walk again because of an individualized exercise program, they will experience a better quality of life that can help all of the organs function better, days in the hospital will decrease, the amount of medicine will decrease, doctor visits will decrease and at the same time a person's self-esteem will increase."

Documented benefits of activity

based therapy include: reduced deterioration due to SCI, reduction of infections, fewer skin irritations, fewer pathologic bone fractures from osteoporosis, and notably less acute respiratory distress.

VWI head trainer, Greg Alderson, has more than 20 years of fitness and exercise training and holds Bachelor of Science degrees from the University of Arkansas in

Health Science and Biological Science, as well as being a board certified CIT. Alderson will soon receive additional training at Project Walk in Carlsbad, CA.



Taking life for granted is the furthest thing from the truth at VWI. In fact, all you have to do is walk around the facility, which is a luxury that most of the clients don't have, and you can begin to understand

the valiant efforts of the clients and staff as they "Push Back" a little bit everyday....

For more information on Victory Walk Inc., please log onto: www.victorywalkinc.com or call Director Lynda Lemke at: **479-365-2600** or email Lynda@victorywalkinc.com

Irene Johnson Takes Gold

Irene Johnson took home a gold medal in the Arkansas Senior Olympics for Long Term Care games recently held at the Malvern Boys and Girls Club. Irene competed in the "hands-only" wheelchair race against five other competitors. Ms. Johnson is an ASCC client and a resident of the Good Samaritan Society-Hot Springs Village Health Care Center. Congrats Irene!

Wilkerson

Continued from page 6

courses at UCA and Arkansas Tech University. In 2007, Governor Mike Beebe made Jon his first appointment to the Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission. Jon has become an integral member of the Commission, utilizing his professional experience, communication skills and personal network to benefit the Commission. His advocacy efforts in the 2009 legislative session resulted in significant grant funding for the Commission. Jon has continued in his advocacy efforts serving as an excellent liaison between consumers, providers, politicians and decision makers.

This year, Governor Beebe appointed Jon to the new Trauma Advisory Board, where his experi-

ence will assist in the development of a state trauma plan that includes rehabilitation. And Jon is just getting started! "We are very lucky to have Jon Wilkerson on our Commission" notes Executive Director Cheryl Vines, "Jon's management skills, clinical expertise and political savvy have already had a huge impact on our Commission."

In his free time, Jon enjoys sports, admitting to being a Dallas Cowboy (but not a Tony Romo) fan. He and his Dad are rebuilding a 1966 GTO, with Jon locating and ordering needed parts and problem solving while his Dad does the 'hand' work.

Watch out Arkansas, Jon Wilkerson is on a roll.



Darrell Sweeden's Goin' Huntin'

Darrell Sweeden was one of five recipients chosen to hunt free courtesy of the local Buckmasters American Deer Foundation (BADF). Mr. Sweeden is an ASCC client and resident of Brookewood Nursing and Rehab in De Queen. Good luck Darrell and thanks to BADF for making this opportunity possible and for their other community projects.

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