



Prosthetic and Orthotic Care, Inc.

In the News.....

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Missouri care Center

1074 Old Des Peres Road
Des Peres, MO 63131
314-775-2041

Illinois care Center

13 Executive Drive, Suite 12
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
1-800-871-5237

www.PandOCare.com

Invention makes living without legs a little bit easier

BY JENNIFER A. BOWEN
NEWS-DEMOCRAT

Neither man has legs, but that doesn't stop them.

Hunting, fishing, driving, mowing the lawn or just going to a ball game might seem out of reach for a person without a lower body, but, with the help of an invention created by a Fairview Heights prosthetist and the ROHO Group of Belleville, both men are proof that you don't have to stop enjoying life if you go through a ' drastic amputation — you just have to learn how to live a little differently.

John Neill, 51, was the first man to give Jon D. Wilson's dry-floatation body bucket a try. Wilson is clinical director of Prosthetic and Orthotic Care him a paraplegic, and he lived Inc. in Fairview Heights.

A car accident at the age of 25 left him a paraplegic, and he lived for almost 25 years without feeling his lower body. In 2001, his legs and pelvis were amputated after a blood infection ravaged his lower body and left no other option but complete amputation.

Neill's hemicorporectomy was the first of its kind performed at St. Louis University. This type of amputation is extremely rare, with only about 30 nationwide living without legs and a pelvis, Wilson said. Neill also was the first patient to slide into the air-cushioned torso prosthetic and give it, a big thumbs up.

It wasn't too hard to get used to life without legs after the surgery, Neill said.

"It was a lot easier, actually, because I didn't have all the excess, dead weight to carry around," he said. "And I don't have to buy pants, socks or shoes. I just have a closet full of T-shirts."

Neill lives in a small town about an hour north of Kansas City and drove to Fairview Heights last week to be fitted for an upgrade of the original model he put on in 2002. Hundreds of air-filled rubber "cells" lining the plastic body bucket were created by ROHO to prevent pressure sores that can mean skin breakdown, infection and possibly even death for patients.

The ROHO Group makes medical devices for people who are bedridden or in wheel-chairs, and therapeutic chairs and cushions for motorists, motorcycle riders, office workers and pilots.



Neill, a hemicorporectomy amputee, lifts his body as Wilson removes his body bucket prosthesis

Charles Edwards, 35 of West Virginia, is the fourth patient to be fitted with Wilson's prosthetic. On Friday, he tried on the custom-designed prosthetic for the first time. He chose a camouflage pattern for the plastic exterior and seemed pleased with the floating-on-air feeling from the interior cushioning.

"What a big difference, he said, comparing his new prosthetic to the old one. "It seems like an old beat up truck compared to a Cadillac. This is so much better than I expected."

Edwards lost the lower half of this body in 2000 when he got crushed on the job as a maintenance man. He had to undergo a bilateral hip

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disarticulation procedure to remove his crushed limbs. "It was hard," he said, of learning to adjust to life without legs. "I was always in bed, I couldn't go out and do things with my kids and I was in pain all the time."

He looks forward to increased activity and less pain with the new prosthesis. "I want to go hunting, fishing, go the ball game and drive more." Neill laughed and encouraged Edwards to get used to using his hands as if they were legs.

"If it's hand-controlled, you can operate it, and after a while, it becomes second nature," Neill said. "I mow my lawn and run a skid-loader with hand-controls."

Neill will have his new prosthetic in about three weeks, Wilson said. The devices cost from \$7,000 to \$10,000 each to make, but can last for many years, depending on whether the patient needs refits from weight loss or gain.

Both men said they don't experience many odd looks or negative response from people out in public who see them for the first time.

"I talk to everyone," Neill said. "I only had one question from a small child. He wanted to know where my legs went and I told him I didn't eat my vegetables."

Edwards said he doesn't get many questions from adults, but fields some from children who ask where his legs are and how come he doesn't have any knees.

"Kids will ask anything," Edwards said. "I would rather them ask questions than not."

Contact reporter Jennifer A. Bowen at jbowen@bnd.com or 618-239-2667