

gizmo

THE TETRA SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA: CUSTOM ASSISTIVE DEVICES

The beat goes on for injured drummer (with a little help from a friend)

HALIFAX: Charlie Quinn had not played the drums in 35 years, but he knew there had to be a way.

The son of a professional drummer, he began lessons at aged 10. As a teenager, he was appointed lead drummer for Halifax Air Cadets on the day he joined.

A gifted athlete, making a name for himself as a minor hockey player, Quinn seemed to have it all.

"I got hurt when I was 22, working on the railroad," he recalled. "I fell under a train on the job and lost my legs and a couple of fingers on my left hand.

"People would say, 'Sit at the drums and play something,' but you can't get a beat without the hi-hat and bass drum. It would happen at weddings, and I would wish I had a set of drums I could play."

Quinn continued his love of life, music and adventure—playing for the Vancouver Cablecars wheelchair basketball team alongside Terry Fox and Rick Hansen—but figured that drumming would not be a part of his life.

But in more recent years Quinn, of Halifax, began to get more interested in making music.

"My best friend has a recording studio in his basement. I found it so interesting that I would go record songs using a midi drum, programmed through a keyboard.

"I got so sick of using a keyboard I thought there had to be a way of playing drums again, so I bought myself a set."

Around this time he heard of Tetra Halifax, and volunteer Lorne Vaasjo was appointed to turn Quinn's dream into reality. Work on the project began this summer.

Vaasjo went in with the idea of putting electronic sensors under Quinn that

would drive electronic instruments ("I had no idea how I would make it work"), but after the two got talking they realized that building pedals into a chair would be the way to go.

"It didn't need fancy electronics," said Vaasjo. "I figured I'd make a seat. I started the first chair at 7 p.m. one evening, and left at 4:30 a.m. He was playing after I went."

The project required many modifications, including molding cups to hold Quinn's stumps, spring-loaded pedals to enable him to play faster and—being done at press time—gel padding to make the whole thing more comfortable.

Quinn is delighted and amazed that Vaasjo is going to such lengths.

"I got sick of not drumming, so this means a great deal to me," he said. "Lorne went to town. He did a great job. People come in and marvel at that chair.

"He came up with the idea for it, and worked very hard on it. He comes round for four and five hours at a time to work on it, and it just keeps getting better and better."



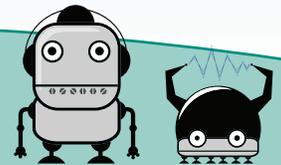
BEAT THIS: DRUMMER CHARLIE QUINN WITH TETRA HALIFAX VOLUNTEER LORNE VAASJO.

Rudolf and Sisk bring cheer with toy delivery

MARITIME CHAPTERS: Tetra volunteers delivered specially adapted toys for children with disabilities.

Bill Rudolf, of the Halifax chapter, was asked to repair and modify items for a toy library for children with disabilities, run by the Progress Centre for Early Intervention. He worked through two batches, making repairs and adding external on-off switches.

"I made them so a switch could be plugged into each toy," he said. "It's to give the children some control. They can bang their arms onto the switch and the toy does stuff."



Meanwhile, Tom Sisk of the Fredericton chapter has been doing similar projects for children connected with the town's Easter Seals group, ranging from remote control trucks to a CD player.

"Parents or grandparents buy a toy then want it adapted to whatever disability that child has," he said. "It's to give the children control over their local environment. It's about giving a child additional mobility or the ability to listen to music when they want, rather than having to wait until someone comes into the room to help them."

TRUNK CALL: VOLUNTEER BILL CASWELL SHOWS HIS ROCKING CHAIR WHEELCHAIR LIFTER.

The rocking and rolling pick-me-up Tetra gizmo



CALGARY: Volunteer Bill Caswell turned to a rocking chair for inspiration when a client asked for a way to enable her to lift a wheelchair to the trunk of her car.

He explained that the lady, who cares for a daughter who has disabilities, was booked in for surgery that would leave her unable to lift the daughter's wheelchair into the trunk.

Not being able to transport the wheelchair would mean that she would be unable to transport her daughter.

Hanging the wheelchair on a frame on the back of the car, in the way people carry bicycles, was not an option for two reasons: it would still have required some lifting; and the salt, sand and dirt on Calgary roads at this time of year would have rendered the chair filthy and unfit to use.

"The client asked for a ramp to get the wheelchair into the back of her car," explained Caswell. "It sounded a bit bulky to me.

"I had the idea to strap the wheelchair to a rocking chair. I made a frame that's a quarter circle—like a great big piece of pie standing on edge.

"You fold the wheelchair up, hook it on to the frame, and rock it all back, and it comes up to the horizontal."

The ingenuity is that the client pushes downwards to lift the chair to car height, and then slides it into the trunk. Removing the chair involves running the process in reverse.

Bill Caswell's ingenious wheelchair-lifting rocker fits into the trunk, on top of the chair, being light enough for the client to lift.

A slight modification was required to enable the project to fit into the client's trunk, which is not a uniform size, but other than that, Caswell described this as "a project I began and ended in a day."

INTERVIEW WITH THE VOLUNTEER:

Marvin Pflug, Dave Doman, Gregg Harris – Vancouver, BC

TETRA HAS MORE THAN 200 VOLUNTEERS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, WORKING ON A VAST RANGE OF PROJECTS – THIS ACCOUNT IS FROM A GROUP WORKING ON A SHARED PROJECT.

A group of Tetra volunteers in Vancouver are undertaking a pilot project to reach out to the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population—seniors.

There are more than 4.2 million Canadians over the age of 65, a number that is expected to double within the next 25 years. However, many remain unaware that adaptive devices can allow a greater level of independence.

Tetra devices currently in use are helping seniors experiencing reduced eyesight, dexterity or mobility due to arthritis, stroke or any one of a range of other medical issues. The issue is that not enough people in this community are aware of Tetra.

So the Vancouver chapter launched a program to reach out to seniors in the community, with the long-term aim of recruiting seniors to make presentations to their peers about Tetra and the benefits of assistive devices to make it self-sustaining.

Tetra's national program coordinator Pat Tweedie explained: "Assistive devices can allow people to be independent and to remain living in their own homes. The message is that there can be something out there that could make your life easier, and that it's OK to ask for help."

So far there have been presentations to seniors groups around the city.

Volunteer Marvin Pflug, a retired civil engineer (who actually works for six to seven

weeks a year in the field, completing bridge inspections) recently talked to a stroke recovery group.

He detailed three of his own projects for seniors, who were stroke patients: a guitar strummer, an adaptation for a guitarist that could no longer use the fret board ("I turned to a Hawaiian guitar he could play with a piece of pipe") and a bumper to prevent a wheelchair user running over his feet.

"They were all seniors," said Pflug, of his audience. "They all seemed to find it interesting."

A Tetra volunteer for five years, Pflug has created ingenious devices for clients of all ages, including the school desk featured in the Spring 2008 *Gizmo*.

Fellow Vancouver volunteer helping out with the seniors project, Dave Doman, has also made a presentation to a receptive audience that was intrigued to think of the possibilities that Tetra assistive devices might offer.

"I've done Tetra projects for seniors in the past," he said. "The overall plan is to make seniors more aware of the help that might be available, if they knew about it. And that means going out and talking to them."

Gregg Harris recalled that he made a presentation to a "quite receptive" seniors group. "They were inspired to hear what Tetra devices are possible.

"Our job is to try and spread the word. A high percentage of our projects are for seniors, but I'd like still more to know about Tetra."

Tetra is looking for seniors that have an interest in problem-solving technology and a passionate drive to help their peers to maintain their independence to act as team leaders. This will involve making presentations to seniors groups in the Metro Vancouver area.

For more information contact Pat Tweedie at 604-688-6464, ext. 108.

"SENIORS ARE THE FASTEST GROWING POPULATION SEGMENT IN CANADA. CURRENTLY, 4.2 MILLION CANADIANS ARE 65 OR OLDER. IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS, THAT NUMBER WILL DOUBLE TO ALMOST NINE MILLION PEOPLE, REPRESENTING ONE QUARTER OF CANADA'S POPULATION."

TONY CLEMENT,
MINISTER OF HEALTH
JUNE 2008





Tetra's message to students with disabilities:

"We just want to let people know there's a world of possibilities out there."

TETRA IS GOING BACK TO SCHOOL in a bid to enable young people with disabilities to progress through higher education to the world of work.

Campus representatives have been established in four Canadian cities—Vancouver, BC; Calgary, AB; Toronto, ON and St John's, NL—to promote Tetra to people from high school age and upwards.

It is based on a pilot project, conducted in Vancouver, last year, which found there were gaps between the support system and students' awareness of helpful adaptive devices.

"Resource centres provide a line to the higher tech options like communication devices, while Tetra can provide a custom-made tray to hold the device," said Pat Tweedie, Tetra Society national program coordinator.

"Tetra is very focused on innovative, day-to-day devices, while resource centres focus on direct academic needs—we can complement what they offer."

Research showed that Tetra devices can free up a student's time to allow him/her to focus more clearly on studies. In addition, these can offer those still in high school the option to live by themselves in order to attend the university of their choice.

Tetra devices for students don't have to be about studying—they could be toothbrush holders or dressing aids, or anything else that speeds the process of getting out of bed, washed, fed and out of the door. It all adds up to independence.

Or they could relate to social life and recreational pursuits that make up college life. For example, Tetra handled a request last year from a quadriplegic who wanted a wheelchair wine glass holder.

"We just want to let people know there's a world of possibilities out there," continued Tweedie. "Maybe somebody is not thinking of going to post-secondary education because it's just too hard to do day-to-day things. Well, we're trying to give them some choices, and hopefully, a few more possibilities."

This program, made possible by federal funding, is for people of all ages—anybody with an interest in education. And people living

outside of the four included cities should contact their own local chapter and talk to their coordinator about possibilities.

Meet the campus representatives:



VANCOUVER, BC
JESSICA PISAREK
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Jessica is in her fifth year at Vancouver's University of British Columbia (UBC) studying international health and development, which has included a one-year exchange in Denmark. Last summer she worked on a health project in Uganda.

She has previously worked for Tetra's sister societies Disabled Independent Gardeners Association and volunteered with BC Mobility Opportunities Society (which arranges hiking in specialist off-road wheelchairs). She ran a booth at UBC's volunteer fair, is working with the Access and Diversity disability services team, and will be visiting high schools, to get the word out.

"The students with disabilities that I spoke to are used to making do, and don't really know what assistive devices they need," she said. "I'd like to get a volunteer to visit people in their rooms to talk about just what is possible."



CALGARY, AB
BRAD CLEMENTS
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Brad is a C5-C6 quadriplegic with a degree in political science but is returning to the University of Calgary to study urban development.

He has been volunteering for the Calgary Tetra chapter for a little over a year, having originally had a project made for him (a dressing device), helping out with marketing and research.

"The Tetra process is fascinating," he said. "There have been many instances of people saying that something is impossible, but then the Tetra volunteer will say, 'Oh, that's do-able.' It's refreshing to get involved in this process.



TORONTO, ON
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Jorge Silva is a recent PhD graduate in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Toronto, Canada. He is a research associate at the university's Adaptive Technology Resource Centre.

Jorge—who is acting representative in Toronto—has also more than 10 years' experience collaborating with people with disabilities in the design, development and evaluation of accessible technologies. He has been a Tetra volunteer for the past 18 months.

"I believe diversity is a social asset because it allows us to build more interesting, resourceful, creative and innovative communities," he said. "People with disabilities are a key element of a diverse society and so I want to do what I can to ensure that my community is enriched by their presence and contributions."



ST JOHN'S, NL
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Erin, who is studying fourth year French and Folklore (which is equivalent to social history) at St John's Memorial University, will be working alongside long-established Tetra coordinator Dr. Leonard Lye, an engineering department lecturer.

She also volunteers with the Student Services run Blundon Centre, which supports students with disabilities

"Newfoundland is a community place, it's a welcoming place," said Skinner. "I've been volunteering since I can remember. I know people that volunteer all over.

"There are a lot of students at Memorial with disabilities, and Tetra is already established, thanks to Dr. Lye."

A frequent traveller turned to Tetra for help overcoming an on-the-road inconvenience



ALL WRAPPED UP: FRANCES DODD'S PORTABLE BATH BENCH.

VANCOUVER: Frances Dodd, of Burnaby, BC, required a way to transfer from her wheelchair to a bath in hotel rooms. She has a bath transfer bench at home, but required something small and light enough to be portable.

“When hotel rooms do have a bath it’s really hard to transfer,” she explained. “I don’t have the balance or strength – it’s quite a distance from the bath to the chair, and it’s a particular problem for quadriplegics like me.

“There are bath benches, but something small and light enough to go in your case just didn’t exist.”

In response, Vancouver volunteer Ryan Jackson designed a flat board with adjustable pipes that fit right across any tub. He gave it a waterproof foam covering—padding necessary to protect the skin.

Dodd was impressed with Jackson’s “ingenious ideas” to cope with varying sized tubs, and his meticulous attention to detail. She has tested out his design on the road, finding it “perfect in both Washington, DC and Williams Lake, BC” this summer, and very useful when she visited Holland in October.

“Anyone would be interested in this,” continued Dodd. “I know many people transfer using a plastic chair, but that’s dangerous, as it slips around.”

Jackson, who described the project as fun, said: “I am pretty happy with the design although it took a couple of tries before I got something that worked.

“I hope somebody else will want one as I would like to try a couple different ways of doing it. Perhaps a little less labor intensive.”

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