

Volunteers reach out to disabled; more help needed

By LAURA TESTER
Advocate staff

Curtis Letniak puts his carpentry skills to good use in the disabled community.

For the last three years, the Lacombe area man has been offering to help build devices for individuals with disabilities.

One project involved making a special rocking cradle for a girl with chronic health problems.

"It needed to be mobile so the caregiver could move her around quite easily," Letniak said.

He constructed it at a certain angle to help with the child's breathing. Letniak also made it sturdy for the active child. The rocking motion gave the child comfort.

"It's one of the most rewarding things to do, to make a difference in somebody's life," Letniak said.

He helps out with the Tetra Society of North America, a group that desperately needs more volunteers.

The Red Deer chapter is seeking mechanically skilled people to create custom-built assistive devices. Engineers, technologists, occupational therapists and machinists are among those who could volunteer.

Nontechnical individuals such as health professionals and the media could also help.

Lisa Wong, program assistant for Tetra in Vancouver, said the society could be helping many more local people with disabilities.

But it only has a handful of volunteers.

And there is no co-ordinator to hold meetings, link technical volunteers to clients and provide information about Tetra.

Without such a person, volunteers or prospective clients have to phone the Vancouver office or go through the Tetra website.

The Red Deer chapter has been without a co-ordinator for about a year.

"We are looking for someone who can give us a one-year commitment," Wong said.

Innisfail-area resident Jim Stone has



Photo by JEFF STOKOE/Advocate staff

Tetra volunteer Curtis Letniak gets a hug from Colton Smeltzers, who was the recipient of a heavy duty change table built by the volunteers at Tetra.

volunteered for the past two years. He's only had two jobs during that time.

"This is the best kept secret in Central Alberta," Stone said.

Stone made a large crib enclosed with glass for a special needs child. He also constructed a call device for a man with multiple sclerosis.

"The gentleman couldn't talk and couldn't move his hands," Stone said. "He'd push the switch device with his head so the caregiver would come."

Stone, who teaches heavy duty mechanics at Olds College, said he and other Tetra volunteers build devices that can't be found commercially.

Sam Sullivan, a quadriplegic in Vancouver, founded Tetra 15 years ago because he was frustrated that aids that could help him were not on the market. He was later paired with an engineer who developed various aids.

The Red Deer chapter was formed in 2000.

Interested volunteers can contact Tetra toll free at 1-877-688-8762, by e-mail at info@tetrasociety.org or go online at www.tetrasociety.org

Deadly day on area roads

Almost everyone has a bad-driving story to tell.

Some don't get to tell them because they're dead.

On any given day, someone will come along and provide a fresh and harrowing example of just how dangerous driving can be in the city and on area highways.

The dangers are often not from adverse conditions affecting traffic, such as weather, but rather poor driving like disobeying basic road rules.

Recently while on a trip north on Hwy 2, a yellow sports car came up behind us much too fast.

The yahoo driver passed on the right side, and then moved into the left lane to pass another vehicle before disappearing. He must have been doing 160 km/h. He was gone so fast, I couldn't even get a licence plate.

There's a price being paid for poor driving — an incredibly horrific one. Our roads this summer have become slaughtering grounds.

In Central Alberta, there have been 16 motor vehicle deaths since June 1 and numerous injuries. It seems like STARS is in and out of this area as often as the thunderstorms roll through.

Police are the ones who time and again have to clean up the mess. Sadly they know personally how dangerous it can be with the recent death of a Mountie on Hwy 2 near Millet. Const. Jose Agostinho was killed on July 4 when he was investigating another accident and his cruiser was struck by a large truck.

I don't include his death in the 15 that have occurred closer to home in Central Alberta over the past six weeks.

In some cases, it's unclear what caused the accident. In some cases it's all too clear.

Here's the awful tally so far:

● Wednesday — 19 km east of Olds, a man and a teen boy died on scene and another man later, after a crash at Hwy 27 and Hwy 791 intersections. RCMP believe a pickup southbound failed to stop at a stop sign and collided with a westbound truck on Hwy 27.

● July 8 — A 60-year-old Red Deer man was killed after his vehicle was struck by a gravel truck near Stettler. The gravel truck operator has been charged with

it.

● June 15 — Deer man drove into an area and ran into a tree, killing the driver.

● June 14 — Red Deer, a man was killed when a single-lane road was blocked.



Mary-Ann Barr

THE BARRSIDE

hicle crossed hit a pickup h Blackfalds at burst into flar instantly. Poli toxicology res

● June 11 — Ponoka, a B.C. when his vehi slammed into

● June 4 — bury man was hicle smacked moving train a north of Didsb

Here's some Alberta Trans cent traffic sta think about as road.

Friday is th prone day of th collision-pron afternoon rush

Following t off the road an across the traf most frequentl proper driver ing to casualty

Fatal collisi frequently in r injury and pro sions occurred eas.

About 22 pe volved in fatal sumed alcohol

Collision-inv users had a mu rate (12.7 per ce