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High-tech Prosthetics Help Negaunee Man Get Back to Life

A devastating diagnosis of bone cancer meant a less than happy beginning to 2009 for 52-year old Karl Wideman of Negaunee.

“I was told in February that I had osteosarcoma which is plenty to have to deal with on its own,” says Karl. “But then I learned that it would be necessary to amputate my leg and remove my hip joint as part of the treatment and was even told I would never walk again. That’s something you’re never prepared to hear.”

An active outdoorsman and an involved member of the community, both in his work as a psychologist helping patients deal with substance abuse and as a coach for his son’s Marquette County Youth Football team, Karl wasn’t willing to accept spending his days struggling to get from one place to the next. Following his amputation in May, he began researching options for prosthetic care in Marquette and contacted Lynn Vanwelsenaer, a Certified Prosthetist for Wright & Filippis, the nation’s largest family-owned provider of prosthetics. Lynn delivered the best news Karl had heard all year – a prosthetic that was recently developed specifically for patients whose limb loss included a hip joint was showing great success.

In September, Karl was fit with the Helix^{3D} Hip Joint System from Otto Bock HealthCare. The first innovation in hip joints in a quarter of a century, the Helix^{3D} name derives from the totally unique three-dimensional movement available from the product. This feature gives the prosthetic leg more natural movement, and the benefits range from the subtle, such as making it easier to get into a car or reach down to tie a shoe, to the profound, such as being able to walk without crutches for the first time

“It was very rewarding to see Karl set aside his crutches and then his cane in order to walk on his own,” says Lynn. “What really made it special and a bit amazing is he was able to do it the very first day he was fit with his new limb.”

Otto Bock's C-Leg® is also part of Karl's prosthesis. The world's first completely computer-controlled artificial leg, the C-Leg utilizes microprocessors to control the knee's hydraulic function 50 times a second, giving incredible stability and mobility to those with lower limb loss. It allows users to walk down stairs step-over-step for the first time since losing their limb and to walk down ramps or slopes and over rough terrain without the fear of falling down, a common occurrence for lower limb amputees using conventional prosthetic legs. Programmed via a laptop computer to match the unique gait of Karl's sound leg, the C-Leg can also be set for different modes (stances for biking, golfing, inline skating, etc.) which are accessed using a remote control.

Karl, through rehab, continues to increase his mobility and independence and doesn't plan to let up anytime soon.

"I have a busy life I'm excited to be getting back to including coaching youth basketball, my career, getting back out into the woods on my four-wheeler. I've come a long way from being told I would never walk again and I'm anxious to keep moving forward."

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Minnesota-based Otto Bock HealthCare LP was established in 1958 as the Americas corporate headquarters of Otto Bock HealthCare, GmbH, based in Duderstadt, Germany. Otto Bock has more than 3,800 employees worldwide and produces over 25,000 types of prosthetic and orthotic components, mobility and rehabilitation products, and is the U.S. leader in delivering continuous passive motion (CPM) services and related therapies. (www.ottobockus.com)