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Athletes with disabilities to demonstrate specialty divisions planned for River Bank Run

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. — On Tuesday, March 20, 1:30 p.m., two athletes with disabilities will visit the David D. Hunting YMCA in Grand Rapids to demonstrate the sports they love – wheeling and handcycling. Wheeler Tom Ottenwess, 45, and handcyclist Brian Kobi, 29, both competitive racers, are training for the May 12 Fifth Third River Bank Run in Grand Rapids, the only 25K race in the nation with divisions for their specialties.

The March exhibition will take place on the third floor of the downtown YMCA, 475 Lake Michigan Dr. Hosted by Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital in Grand Rapids, the exhibition will provide media outlets an opportunity to meet the athletes, learn about their sports and personally trial the racing equipment before race day.

“We strive to educate athletes with disabilities to participate in sports they have passion for. If it’s running, then the River Bank Run is a place for them,” says Heidie Snyder, PTA, CTRS of Mary Free Bed.

The Mary Free Bed Guild has sponsored a wheelchair division in the River Bank Run since 1989. This is the first year a handcycling division, also sponsored by Mary Free Bed, will be offered. For more information about the River Bank Run’s wheeling and handcycling divisions, please visit “Upcoming Events” at www.maryfreebed.com.

Ottenwess and Kobi will race the YMCA track together to demonstrate their cycles. They will be available to answer questions afterward.

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About the athletes

Ottenwess, 44, has been wheeling competitively for 22 years. The 1985 River Bank Run was his first race following a spinal cord injury. Ottenwess has competed in wheeling races throughout the United States, as well as in Canada and Japan. “I like wheeling because it’s a sport I can do on my own,” Ottenwess says. “I do it for the fun, the fitness, and the competition.”

Kobi, 29, transitioned from wheeling to handcycling three years ago. He began racing as a wheeler while in college and has competed in the United States and Japan. “I moved into handcycling following rotator cuff surgery,” Kobi says. “The sport is growing in popularity because it’s easier to learn than wheeling. It’s also faster and, for me, more fun because I can ride and talk with friends at the same time.”

Kobi is a financial advisor for an investment services company. He also serves as a volunteer mentor at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital for patients with spinal cord injuries.

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Established in 1891, the Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital Guild is a non-profit organization that owns and operates Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital.

Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital is an 80-bed, not-for-profit, acute rehabilitation center. Its mission is to restore independence, hope, and freedom through rehabilitation to people with disabilities. Programs include brain injury; spinal cord injury; stroke and orthopedic; pediatric/adolescent; amputee; Lymphedema; Vestibular; motion analysis center; rehab technology center; orthotics and prosthetics services; and driver rehab.

Event Footage and Photos Available Upon Request.