SCI News

A publication by the Spinal Cord Injury Program at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital.

Issue #8; Spring/Summer 2009



David Briggs, a former spinal cord injury patient at Mary Free Bed and dad of two girls, visiting Lake Michigan.

Turn Your Vacation Into a "Staycation"! Summer Fun Right Here in Michigan

Arguably, Michigan is at its best in the warm, lazy months of summer. Kids are out of school, beaches beckon, and campfires blaze – why leave Michigan when you can enjoy a "staycation" in the very state you call home?

But, vacationing when you're in a wheelchair requires a lot of advanced planning. You'll want all the information you can get before you set out to explore everything the state has to offer. Check out our list of accessible venues and tips from those who have been there and done that.

First Things First – Advocate for Yourself

Maria Besta, a recreational therapist for Mary Free Bed and president of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association, is married to Pat Besta, a wheelchair user. The couple, with their set of twins, is always on the move, but often run into barriers.

"You have to constantly advocate for yourself to make sure your needs are met," says Maria about traveling with a wheelchair user. "People aren't educated – you have to tell them what you can do. If you don't advocate for yourself, you'll find that you're always going to the same places; you won't be visiting anywhere new."

Camping, Parks, and Beaches Camping

Michigan.gov/dnr MichCampgrounds.com/kibbycreek/

No doubt about it, a majority of Michigan's residents love to camp, but if you use a wheelchair, you'll need to do some research before heading out.

"If possible, check out campgrounds before you make your reservation," advises Kelly Merz, recreational therapist for the Spinal Cord Injury Program at Mary Free Bed and wheelchair user. "Often, state parks are more accessible than small, mom and pop' facilities. Hoffmaster in Muskegon is a great park. The Yogi Bear campgrounds usually work well. Be aware that a lot of older campgrounds don't have accessible restrooms."

David Briggs, a former spinal cord injury patient at Mary Free Bed and dad of two girls, also recommends sticking with the state parks. Most of the state parks have paved drives. Mears State Park in Pentwater has a newer bath house, according to David, which has benches in the showers. One bathroom has a toilet, shower, and sink. Plus, there's a lift at the pool.

continued on next page





Kelly Merz, with her husband and daughter, camping at Yogi Bear campground, Silver Lake, MI.

Curt Bender, also a former Mary Free Bed patient, his wife Lynn, and their child, make it a goal to go camping somewhere new every summer. "It's a hunt [to find an accessible campground], believe me," says Lynn, "Google everything. What one person says is accessible might not be. Always look for paved roads and always call the campground with questions."

Lynn reports the cabins at the Silver Lake state campground are accessible. Near Ludington, Kibby Campground has double wide trailers for rent, paved roads, an accessible playground, and an outdoor pool. Before making a reservation, Lynn contacted the campground to see if the staff could make a ramp to one of the trailer rentals. She gave the campground two months' notice and the staff came through. The Bender family had a great camping experience.

"Yogi Bear campgrounds also have one room cabins," Lynn says. "It's a step up into the cabin, but it can be done. Don't rule it out, don't give up, talk to the owner. Even with one step up you can make it happen."

TIP!

If you camp using a tent, put the tent entrance near the pavement so you can roll in.

Parks Versluis Park PlainfieldCharterTwp.org/pctversluis.htm

If you have kids, you know they love to go to the park. But often parks aren't wheelchair friendly. Versluis Park (north of Grand Rapids) is an exception. The park was specifically designed to provide equal recreational opportunities. Fully accessible, the park comprises playground areas, picnic facilities, beach and swimming areas with lifeguard stations and a bathhouse, fishing,

boating, and two miles of paved trails. The park features: beach access consisting of a deck, transfer step/backrest, shade trellis and seating; lake access from a wheelchair ramp and transfer-step system down to the water; and fishing access from a floating pier that has seating and wheelchair accessible fishing stations.

Millennium Park Millennium-Park.org

You and your kids will love a day at the fully accessible Millennium Park in southwest Grand Rapids. It features a 100-acre lake with six acres of sandy beach frontage; fishing; marked swimming areas and a bath house; concession stand; playground areas; and a "Splashpad". The park also provides paved, all-purpose trails along the Grand River.

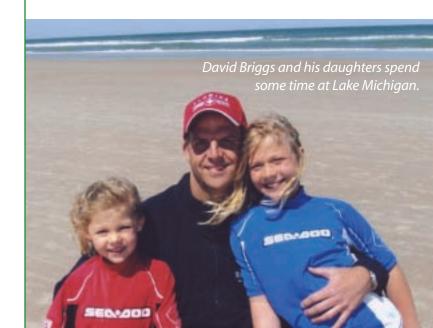
TIP!

You can wheel all the way down to the water at Millennium Park.

Lake Michigan Beaches

David Briggs loves to swim, but admits the beach can be a major obstacle. "More and more state parks are becoming accessible, though," David says.

David reports having good luck with accessibility at many of the state parks along Lake Michigan. Just like camping, he favors Mears State Park in Pentwater for its beach. Beach chairs at the park in Pentwater and at other parks, including the Grand Haven City Beach and the beach in Saugatuck, are free to use. Some parks have several chairs. Just go to the park's ranger station and give your name and identification to hold the chair. At some parks, the rangers will wheel you right down to



the water. Chairs are meant to go right into the lake so you can get out and swim.

While David hasn't had problems with obtaining beach chairs at the state parks, others have reported having a hard time getting a chair, and that it's difficult to wheel once you're in the sand. At the Grand Haven City Beach and in Saugatuck there are boardwalks that will get you close to the water - but then you're still faced with getting from the boardwalk down to the water. Make sure you have someone strong with you who can help you wheel to the lake's shoreline.

TIP!

Bring wet wipes with you to the beach. You'll be covered in sand regardless of what you do! Bring a beach umbrella, too. Beach chairs have a place where you can attach one with no hassle.

Amusement Parks Cedar Point CedarPoint.com

So Cedar Point isn't technically in Michigan, but it's just over the border! If you're headed to the Point this summer, you should find the park very accessible. The park's Web site has a lot information you'll find useful for your visit. The park has drop off and pick up areas and admission gates wide enough to accommodate your chair. Most of the park's restaurants, shops, and food stands are designed for easy maneuverability.

Cedar Point rates each ride for its special features. Participate responsibly - carefully heed all warning signs! Refer to the ride admission policy available at the Park Operations Office or Town Hall. You and one riding companion may enter via the special access entrance after members of your party wait in line. On most rides, you'll have to transfer from your wheelchair to ride. See rider safety signs at ride entrances for special access entrances.

Most restrooms at Cedar Point meet ADA guidelines. Service animals are welcome at the park, but must remain with a non-riding member of your party (though your service animal is allowed on a handful of rides). Cedar Point staff are not permitted to take control of service animals. To recharge your wheelchair battery, go to the Park Operations Office. Manual and power wheelchairs as well as electric convenience vehicles are available for rent. However, Cedar Point doesn't guarantee that chairs or vehicles will be available on the day you visit.

Michigan's Adventure Michigans Adventure.com

Michigan's Adventure is owned by the same organization that owns Cedar Point so you will see many of the same efforts to be wheelchair friendly. At Michigan's Adventure, at least one able-bodied member of the party should move through the line in the normal fashion. Once your party is ready to board, you may enter through the special access entrance. Michigan's Adventure staff aren't trained in wheelchair transfers and aren't permitted to do transfers. Plan your visit with someone who can physically help you, when necessary. On all rides where guests in wheelchairs can be accommodated, you will have to leave your chair. Most water rides are inaccessible.

Sporting Events Detroit Tigers (Comerica Park) DetroitTigers.com

For you baseball fans, visiting Comerica Park should be hassle-free. The Detroit Tigers' Web site gives you specific information on drop off and pick up areas. Allow adequate time for drop off – as game time approaches, streets can become inaccessible. Many parking facilities surrounding Comerica Park have ADA compliant parking spaces. Accessible seating is available in various seating categories. All restrooms in Comerica Park are wheelchair accessible, and service animals are allowed.

Whitecaps (Fifth Third Ballpark) Whitecaps-Baseball.com

Fifth Third Ball Park, home of the Whitecaps, has wheelchair accessible spaces in the box, reserved Pepsi Stadium Club, and Miller Lite House Deck seating sections, each with at least one chair to accommodate one companion per guest with a wheelchair. Elevators take fans to the box seat level. The Pioneer State Mutual Insurance Deck, Superior's Landing, Centennial Securities Dream Deck, and the DTE Energy Suite Level are also barrier-free. Fifth Third Ballpark has handicapped reserved parking spaces in all lots and all restrooms are wheelchair accessible.

Zoos John Ball Zoo JohnBallZooSociety.org

John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids has wheelchairs available on a first-come, first-served basis, and they're free to use. All restrooms are entirely accessible, as is the whole zoo and all the exhibits. According to Krys Bylund, the zoo's marketing director, the three things that the zoo is



Kelly Merz and her family enjoy a day at the wheelchair-friendly Binder Park Zoo, Battle Creek, MI.

and the swan boats. "We've looked at how we could get a person without the use of their legs or arms onto those experiences, but it will be challenging," says Krys.

TIP!

Everything is uphill right from the get-go. If you go in a manual chair, be prepared for a workout!

Binder Park Zoo BinderParkZoo.org

Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek reports good accessibility. Handicapped parking is available and courtesy wheelchairs are available on a first come, first served basis. All restrooms are accessible. In the Wild Africa attraction, one of the boardwalks turns to a dirt walk for a short time and there are also some hills, but otherwise, the zoo is very wheelchair friendly.

Mackinac Island

Mackinaclsland.org/disabilities.html

If you haven't been to Mackinac Island, you should find the trip very accessible. Ferry lines have handicapped parking and experienced dock porters to help with unloading and loading your vehicle. A few ferries to the island have stairs to the passenger cabin. Contact the ferry companies before your trip for more information about limitations.

You may bring your own chair or you can rent a power wheelchair on the island. For carriage tours, Mackinac Island Carriage Tours has one wheelchair accessible carriage. Make reservations at least 24 hours in advance. Most properties on Mackinac Island are accessible, but there are a few older properties that are difficult to maneuver in a chair. All attractions are accessible by wheelchair, with the exception a few. Check the Web site above for more information.

Ask the Doctor

By Sam Ho, MDSpinal Cord Injury Program
Medical Director



Finally...Summer! On this beautiful sunny day, I'm thinking that often the best medicine is to go outside, enjoy the fresh air and sunshine, and have fun with family and friends.

Participation in leisure interests and recreation provides multiple physical and psychological benefits, such as improved health, fitness, and mood. It also increases your social network by meeting new people. This is why we include recreation therapy as a component of our Spinal Cord Injury Program. I hope this issue also gives you ideas or encourages you to get involved in one of our upcoming adaptive sports clinics.

While you're out enjoying your summer, keep in mind the following safety tips so that you can spend more time having fun and less time with the doctor – or one of his nurses!

Sunburn and Heat-Related Illness – Beware of too much of a good thing. Lack of sensation can contribute to sunburn; certain medications can cause increased sensitivity to the sun (see package insert or ask your pharmacist or doctor). Your spinal cord injury also affects your internal temperature regulation and ability to tolerate heat. Lack of perspiration can lead to overheating. Apply sunscreen, dress in layers (lightweight, light-colored clothing that reflects the heat), wear a hat, and closely monitor time spent in the sun, especially on hot, humid days.

Keep yourself hydrated – always carry water with you and balance fluid intake with bladder management. Adjust your cathing schedule as you increase fluids. Some people also like to use a spray water bottle to cool off. Avoid strenuous activity on very warm, humid days and take regular rest breaks. Avoid caffeine and alcohol; they actually cause your body to lose more fluids, which can lead to dehydration. If you do experience sunburn, apply cold compresses to skin for comfort; do NOT pop blisters – cover with a clean bandage. If you experience fever or chills, call your doctor.

Heat-related illness can be serious and can sneak up on you. Signs of heat exhaustion (not to be confused with autonomic dysreflexia) most commonly include cool, moist, pale, flushed or red skin; headache; dizziness, weakness, or exhaustion; or nausea. If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to quickly get cool and comfortable. Get out of the sun and find shade or an air-conditioned location, drink cool water, and remove or loosen tight clothing. Wet towels can also be used to cool down. Later stages of heat-related illness - called heat stroke - are very serious and include vomiting; decreased alertness or loss of consciousness; high body temperature; rapid, weak pulse; or rapid, shallow breathing. The late stage of a heat-related illness is life threatening – call 911.

Skin Care and Injury Prevention – Nothing can ruin your summer like having to stay in bed to heal a pressure area or burn. Even if you're on vacation, make sure you continue to do regular pressure relief (for 1 minute every 15 minutes) and daily skin inspections to look for red marks and unusual scrapes, burns, or insect bites that may become inflamed or need medical attention.

Use caution with unfamiliar or unusual transfers or positions. For example, be careful when using adaptive sports equipment or transferring to and riding on boats or amusement park rides. Try to minimize bumping, scraping, or shearing injuries. Even if you are able to transfer onto bleachers, benches, or boat seats, use your wheelchair cushion when sitting on these hard surfaces as it provides the best padding. When camping, use an air mattress or other padded surface, and make sure you re-position or turn yourself during the night as you would at home.

Remember to be very cautious around summer heat sources, such as campfires and grills, to avoid burns. Surfaces that soak up the sun can cause serious burns to unprotected bare skin that lacks sensation. Watch out for beach sand, metal, and dark vinyl/upholstery surfaces, such as car or boat seats, and even your wheelchair cushion if it has been sitting in the hot sun. For good skin care, it's also important to change out of wet or sweaty clothing promptly.

Insect Stings and Bites – Again, prevention is the best medicine. When you're outdoors, use insect repellent and reapply, as recommended. If stung by a bee, try to remove the stinger as quickly as possible. Scrape out the stinger with a blunt-edged object, such as a credit card or dull knife. Wash the area with soap and water two to three times daily until healed. Apply a cold pack such as an ice pack wrapped in a cloth or a cold, wet

washcloth for several minutes. Take Tylenol or similar medication for pain.

A sting anywhere in the mouth warrants immediate medical attention; additionally, seek medical care if you notice a large skin rash, large area of swelling around the sting site, or if swelling or pain persists for more than 72 hours. Signs of a serious or potential fatal allergic reaction include wheezing or difficulty breathing, tightness in the throat or chest, swelling of the lips, dizziness or fainting, nausea or vomiting. If you experience any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately. If you have a known allergy to bee stings, talk with your doctor about having emergency medication on hand.

Spider bites can be addressed by similar steps as a bee string. Wash the bite with soap and water, apply cool compresses, and take Tylenol or similar medication for pain. However, if you suspect the bite is from a poisonous spider (black widow or brown recluse spider), apply ice and head for the emergency room. Symptoms include a deep blue or purple area around the bite surrounded by a whitish ring and a large outer red ring, body rash, muscle spasms, tightness or stiffness, abdominal pain, headache or fever, general feeling of sickness, lack of appetite, joint pain, and nausea or vomiting.

Tick bites should be reported to your doctor as your doctor may want to save the tick after removal. Use tweezers to grasp the tick firmly at its head or mouth next to your skin. Pull firmly and steadily on the tick until it lets go, then swab the bite site with alcohol. Never use petroleum jelly or a lit match to kill or remove a tick!

Water Safety – When near or in the water, always have someone with you and wear an approved flotation device. Never swim alone, and make sure you know the water's temperature, depth, and currents before entering. Enter "feet first, first time" to avoid diving injuries. Make sure you know your swimming abilities and that you have enough energy or capable assistance to safely reach and return to your destination (shore). Our therapeutic recreation specialists are available to provide swim evaluations, teach adaptive swimming techniques, and provide suggestions regarding flotation devices.

Remember that alcohol and water do not mix. Alcohol impairs your judgment, affects your reaction time, and greatly increases the risk of accident and injury. Never swim, participate in water sports, or operate a water craft after drinking alcohol.

Before You Leave Home – At a minimum, always carry your medical insurance card and personal identification, including any emergency instructions (autonomic dysreflexia card, for example); a current list of medications, dosages and any allergies; emergency contact information (phone numbers of nearest relatives, power of attorney, health care providers); and phone numbers for your pharmacy and equipment vendors (wheelchair, vehicle conversion company).

You should always keep the following supplies in your wheelchair bag with you: catheters, wipes, hand sanitizer, lubricant, extension tubing, urinal or other container to cath into. It's a good idea to keep these items with you or close to you (wheelchair bag or vehicle) in case of incontinence: extra set of underwear and pull-on style pants or shorts, wipes, two to three garbage bags or plastic grocery bags (large enough to cover your wheelchair cushion), disposable gloves, bleach wipes, liquid or bar soap, or Attends/pads.

If you are going on an extended vacation, you'll want to make sure you have more than enough medication and supplies to last for the length of your trip in case you encounter unexpected delays in returning. If you are flying or traveling abroad, it's crucial to keep your medications in their original labeled containers. Contact your airline for additional instructions regarding packing and carry-on items. You may also want to know the location of the nearest pharmacy and hospital/emergency room where you'll be staying.

So...whether it's going water skiing; spending a day at the beach, an amusement park or the local zoo; going fishing, camping, or having a cookout; stay safe and healthy and make the most of your summer fun!

Program Staff

Amy Arends, RN, BSN, CRRN Nurse Care Coordinator, Spinal Cord Injury Program

Sam Ho, MD Medical Director, Spinal Cord Injury Program

Bill Sonday, LMSW Director, Inpatient Therapy Programs

Jackie Wondolowski, LMSW Manager, Spinal Cord Injury Program



Event Information

Mary Free Bed Sponsors Prize Money for Midwest Outdoor Wheelchair Tennis Championships July 24-26, 2009

Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association (GRWSA) is proud to host a USTA- and ITF-sanctioned tennis tournament offering over \$10,000 in prize money. This tournament attracts athletes from around the world and offers a men's, women's, juniors and quad division. Players compete from the Elite Open, A, B and C levels. This is a great opportunity to come out and watch some spectacular wheelchair tennis and cheer on our local athletes. It will be held at the new Orchard Hills Tennis Center and will have up to 15 local players participating. For more information, please visit the GRWSA website at www.grwsa.com or email info@grwsa.com.

Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association also offers wheelchair tennis opportunities for high school and college students.

Information

For more information on junior tennis in West Michigan this summer, please visit www.grwsa.com and click on junior tennis.

For more information on Grand Valley State University's Collegiate Wheelchair Tennis Program, please visit www.grwsa.com and click on collegiate tennis, or e-mail info@grwsa.com. ■





GRWSA Handcycling Team

The handcycling team is in its beginning stages; the first race this year was the Fifth Third River Bank Run 25K on May 9, 2009. Over the summer months, the team will be riding twice a week on the White Pine and Kent Trails. There is a link to the trail maps under handcycling on the GRWSA web site at www.grwsa.com. Bryan Wilkinson is the team coach and encourages those interested in being involved to contact him at GRWSAhandcycling@gmail.com.

32nd Annual Fifth Third River Bank Run



Wheelchair and Handcycle Divisions -20th Year of Sponsorship by Mary Free Bed Guild

This year was the 20th year that the Mary Free Bed Guild and the Spinal Cord Injury Program sponsored the Wheelchair Division of the Fifth Third River Bank Run - the only 25K wheelchair race in the country. Three years ago, a handcycle division was added to this race and has become very popular. At a press conference held at the David D. Hunting YMCA on March 12, 2009, Molly Krauss, MFB Guild President, unveiled a special 20th anniversary logo, which was on the racing bibs of all wheelchair and handcycle athletes. Also new this year was an award sponsored by the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association (GRWSA) – a special wicking shirt and plague – for a former Mary Free Bed inpatient or current outpatient who finished the race first. This year's award was won by Travis Peruski (2001). **Congratulations Travis!**

For a complete list of race finishing times, visit www.MaryFreeBed.com. ■

Travis Peruski (pictured right) 2009 winner of the Mary Free Bed alumni award sponsored by GRWSA.





Ms. Wheelchair Michigan Competition

Congratulations to Amber Marcy, who was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Michigan 2009 on Saturday, February 28! She became the title holder after a full day of competition which included workshops, private interviews, and a platform speech. This year's pageant was held at the Donnelly Conference Center on the campus of Aquinas College, and was coordinated by Shelly Loose, Ms. Wheelchair Michigan 2007.

Amber, age 27, of Saugatuck, Michigan, sustained a spinal cord injury from an automobile accident when she was 15. Amber's motto is "Life Rolls On!" She has not allowed her condition (quadriplegia) or use of a wheelchair stop her from living her life to the fullest. After completing her inpatient rehabilitation at Mary Free Bed, Amber graduated from Saugatuck Public High School and Grand Rapids Community College. She plans to start working toward her Bachelor's degree in social work and counseling so she can help people with disabilities. Currently, she volunteers at the Center for Women in Transition in Holland as a crisis line counselor and sexual assault victim advocate and receptionist. Amber's message is that while her wheelchair has not defined her; it has refined her. She has learned to embrace the challenges in her life and will use her new title as a way to encourage others.

Representatives from an independent production company in Los Angeles, Defining Media, were present at this year's pageant to capture film footage that will become part of a documentary on the Ms. Wheelchair America program. Michigan's program will be spotlighted in this documentary. They will return to Michigan to follow Amber as she makes appearances and prepares to compete for the title of Ms. Wheelchair America 2010 in Rapid City, South Dakota, from August 24 – 30, 2009. We wish Amber much success during her reign as Ms. Wheelchair Michigan!



Event Calendar

Adaptive Water Ski Clinics

July 10 and July 31, 2009 John Collins Park Reeds Lake, East Grand Rapids

Adaptive Kayak Clinic

August 19, 2009 John Collins Park Reeds Lake, East Grand Rapids

SCI Support Group Meetings

4th Monday of Month (each quarter)
Upcoming dates:
July 27 and October 26, 2009
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital
2nd floor conference room

For more information, please visit www.MaryFreeBed.com.

Non-Profit Org US Postage PAID Grand Rapids, MI Permit No. 1034 RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Spinal Cord Injury ProgramMary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital
235 Wealthy SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503-5247