



**MARY FREE BED CONTACTS:**

Meg Derrer, Marketing Director, (616) 242-0474, [meg.derrer@maryfreebed.com](mailto:meg.derrer@maryfreebed.com).  
Christine Hoek, Public Relations, (616) 662-9241, [christine@articulate-pr.com](mailto:christine@articulate-pr.com)

**DAVID D. HUNTING YMCA CONTACT:**

Gary Wade, Public Relations Specialist, (616) 745-0874, [gwade@gymca.org](mailto:gwade@gymca.org)

**Mary Free Bed Fitness Program empowers patients to continue progress**

**MARY FREE BED UTILIZES NEW GRAND RAPIDS YMCA FOR FITNESS PROGRAM FOR PATIENTS WITH SPINAL CORD INJURIES**

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. — Breakthroughs in spinal cord injury research have been occurring so rapidly in recent years that scientists now define the prospects for eventual recovery as a matter of “when” and not “if.”

Consequently, individuals with spinal cord injuries are advised to keep themselves as fit as possible to increase the likelihood that their bodies will respond favorably to future treatments that may become available.

**Toward that end, the Spinal Cord Injury Program at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital is utilizing the David D. Hunting YMCA, both of Grand Rapids, Mich., as the designated facility where therapists are helping patients with spinal cord injuries to implement fitness programs aimed at helping them attain their optimal level of physical fitness in a real-world environment. This step toward community reintegration into a “state-of the-art” accessible gym is an additional benefit.**

The Fitness Program was created as an extension of Mary Free Bed’s Spinal Cord Injury Program. This exercise therapy component is especially appropriate, given that most spinal cord injuries occur to males under age 40 – people who tended to be very physically active before their injury.

“The desire to be active doesn’t diminish following an injury,” says Dr. John Butzer, medical director of Mary Free Bed. “The physical and mental benefits achieved from exercise, including greater strength, endurance, flexibility, and self-esteem, are important to spinal cord injured patients.”

-- more --

MFB/YMCA, Page 2 of 2

The Spinal Cord Injury Fitness Program is especially timely because it's being launched following the U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona's call to action encouraging such programs for persons with disabilities.

### **How the Program Works**

Spinal Cord Injury Fitness Program therapists educate patients regarding the benefits of engaging in regular exercise. During their stay at Mary Free Bed, patients with spinal cord injuries who meet program criteria will visit the YMCA with a physical therapist, occupational therapist, and therapeutic recreation specialist who will help them develop exercise programs and leisure activities to implement after their discharge.

Exercise programs will be customized for individual patients, taking into account their injury, functional status, endurance, and personal interests. Mary Free Bed chose to partner with the new David D. Hunting YMCA in part because the barrier-free facility provides various exercise options for people with disabilities, including weights, cardio and strengthening equipment, swimming pools, basketball courts, and a rock climbing wall. The YMCA offers wheelchair users an incredible state-of-the-art, barrier-free facility — from accessible locker rooms to high-tech fitness equipment.

Additionally, the YMCA provides a sense of community. "Reintegration into the community after an injury is extremely important," says Jackie Wondolowski, spinal cord injury program supervisor for Mary Free Bed. "Life goes on. This program will help foster independence and opportunities for persons with spinal cord injuries."

Following discharge, patients will have the option to join the YMCA. "If patients are from a different part of the state or region, we can direct them to a Y near their home," says Sarah Gray, senior programming director of health and wellness of the David D. Hunting YMCA. "We also provide financial assistance and scholarship programs for those who qualify, making access potentially available to all."

-- more --



MFB/YMCA, Page 2 of 3

### **To Learn More**

For an interview about the collaborative effort between Mary Free Bed and the David D. Hunting YMCA, please contact Christine Hoek (616) 662-9241, [christine@articulate-pr.com](mailto:christine@articulate-pr.com) or Rick Kamel (312) 775-8399, (312) 802-0455, [rkamel@rcn.com](mailto:rkamel@rcn.com).

The Spinal Cord Injury Fitness Program is the latest example of Mary Free Bed's commitment to offering patients hope and freedom. To learn more about the program, which is available to Mary Free Bed patients; please call (616) 493-9568 or (800) 528-8989 or log on to [www.maryfreebed.com](http://www.maryfreebed.com).

###

*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. As West Michigan's largest provider of rehabilitation services, its services include: quality patient care for both inpatient and outpatient settings; rehabilitation research; education and training; assistive technology; and advocacy. 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.*

*Founded in 1866, the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids is composed of seven branches that serve 118,468 in the greater Grand Rapids community. YMCA core programs include; aquatics, camping, child care, family, health and wellness, leadership development, arts and humanities, Service-Learning, and youth/adult sports. All program curriculum is structured to develop the YMCA's Core Values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility. The vision of the YMCA is to be the community leader in building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities.*