

On the Road Again

That's Aim of Program In Driver Rehabilitation

Say you've had an accident. A serious one. Maybe diving into shallow water. Or in an automobile. You've lost the use of your limbs but you're a fighter. You want to rehabilitate yourself, to get back into the mainstream. To work, to play. What's one of your first moves?

To be able to drive. Because no matter what kind of rehab training that might lead eventually to a job, a person still needs to have some way of getting back and forth. Waiting for a bus in Rochester's winter can be foreboding for a person in a wheelchair.

Thanks to Donald Pender and the driver education program at the Rochester Rehabilitation Center, persons who are disabled in the manner described above — quadriplegics — and others who have been handicapped from birth, strokes or who are paraplegics (loss of use of legs) and other disabled persons have a place to turn to.

Pender was a driving instructor in the Rochester school system back in 1968 when he decided to take on the challenge of establishing the driver ed program at the center, now located in the Al Sigl Center.

"I didn't have much experience with handicapped so I went to the Rusk Institute in New York City and trained under Jerry Sapajlo, an expert in this field, for six weeks," Pender said.

He cites the continuing need for the program, mentioning that he and his staff are currently working with 44 clients and have a backlog of more than 50 as of the end of July. The number of clients is always increasing and so has the staff at the center.

"What started as a one-man operation now has four instructors and two volunteer workers," Pender said, adding that another instructor is needed but finances won't allow it.

"Even though I have been at this for 13 years," Pender said, "I think the whole concept is still in its infancy. We should be growing but are always hampered by lack of funds; there's always a crisis, it seems."

Almost all of the referrals (95 percent) come from the State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The rest come on their own or through referrals by their doctors.

A fee is charged — \$110 for evaluation and \$345 for training — and the fees apply regardless of sessions. A self-sponsored client pays \$16.50 per session but the total is not to exceed the maximum fees.

"But we never turn away anyone for lack of funds," Pender added. "If a self-referred person says he or she can't afford the fee, we work something out. We do insist on some charge, even if it is only 50 cents a session — it helps incentive."

The average client takes 27 sessions but some have had as many as 80 sessions, Pender said. This, however, does not mean that the program continues a person regardless of progress.

"After the 12th session," Pender said, "a board of the instructor fall our instruction is one-on-one, the director of rehabilitation and myself, discuss whether we will continue

Instructor Kathy McPhillips gives Michael Roach some pointers in the "quad van," a specially-equipped vehicle. Toggle switches are used for shifting, the brake and accelerator are hand-operated and the steering wheel requires "zero effort."



Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

on with the driver, do they have the ability. If we decide yes, then another eight sessions are added and then we meet again. Then we meet every six sessions."

The program, as indicated, is broken into two parts — evaluation and training. In evaluation, the individual's physical and emotional potential are analyzed through private, off-the-road area training. After six to eight sessions, Pender determines whether it is feasible to begin actual driver training.

The training varies with the individual — some have never driven before and some have to be rehabilitated to use special equipment. But all must take the standard state driving licence road tests.

"The Motor Vehicle Bureau gives them the same test as anyone else," said Bill Sipple, a volunteer at the center — "maybe a little tougher."

What kind of drivers are such disabled persons?

Pender answers that question quickly: "When Vincent Tofany was commissioner of motor vehicles he said that statistics show the disabled have much better driving records than so-called able-bodied drivers. And reports from the Auto Club headquarters in Chicago indicate each year that the handicapped driver is a better driver."

Why would that be?

"I guess you'd have to have some kind of disability to understand how important driving is to them. They know the value of an auto to their very life. They must depend on it for practically everything — to maintain their independence. This is kind of like the Last Chance Saloon, if they don't make it here, they won't make it."

In addition to the four instructors and two volunteers, Sipple and Eddie Gadd, the program has two specially-equipped vans (one at a cost of \$23,500) and four simulators (about \$8,400 each).

"Everything I've done has been by the grace of God," Pender said — "and a little bit of luck. There was a time when I felt we needed a simulator but had no money. Out of the blue came an anonymous donor, a lovely elderly lady, who donated \$25,000 to the center and we got our simulators."

Pender said his most pressing needs at present are for funds to make another instructor affordable and for volunteers — "they're wonderful and very needed."

Not all of the referrals are from this locale. For the five years until 1980, 415 were from Monroe County, 178

from outside. And the referral load increased dramatically since 1980, according to Sipple.

Among out-of-town clients at present is Mike Roach, 19, of Camillus in Onondaga County. He is a peer counselor at the Independent Living Center in Syracuse and is undergoing intensive training with Mrs. Kathy McPhillips. Roach already has his driving permit and some experience but needs special training in driving with quadriplegic equipment. He is paralyzed as a result of a high school wrestling accident.

Out-of-towners stay in local motels with facilities for handicapped and receive two sessions a day for two weeks.

So the program continues and probably expands — "As the population increases so does the number of handicapped," Pender pointed out, "and that means we will have to help more and more."

Thanks to the Rochester Rehabilitation Center and its driver training program, that person suddenly disabled through an accident and the one who has been handicapped from birth have a place and dedicated people to help them get back on the road to self-fulfillment.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

Boots Out, Dogs In

A little of this and some of that ...

The New York Times Sunday Magazine is customarily filled with advertising showing the latest in fashion trends. At the beginning of summer at least six different pages were devoted to cowboy boots in varying shades (a couple were of a purple hue). And, sure enough, a stroll in a local mall this past week turned up a surfeit of western footwear.

In one store, a young woman, about 18, dressed in a skirt with a ruffle around the hem and a strapless stretch bodice was trying on a pair. I couldn't decide whether the scene was ludicrously delightful or delightfully ludicrous. At any rate, I don't plan on adding any to my wardrobe — I know the designers are going to be crushed — nor, for that matter, will I add army fatigues, designer jeans or football jersey, each of which has been pronounced de rigueur by the fashion plates who reside at our house.

A recent medical report further extols the advantages of owning a pet. For many people, an animal is the only source of love, affection, com-

panionship. Even for those individuals who do not lack for the above ingredients, a pet is a good thing — animals are non-judgmental.

It is true. The other night I came downstairs dressed for an evening out. The oldest took one look and suggested a different belt and hairdo. The youngest opined that, as usual, I had been too light with the makeup, and their brother complained that my perfume was drowning out the smell of his peanut butter sandwich.

The dog, on the other hand, wagged her tail ecstatically at the sight of me and attempted to kiss me. Out of gratitude I almost let her.

Use Seat Belts, Council Urges

In a letter to "religious leaders in Rochester and Monroe County," the Rochester Safety Council has asked that "parishioners" participate in its Labor Day weekend campaign, "Make It Click."

Stating that "it is possible that 12,000 of the 53,000 persons killed in 1980" on the highways would have been saved if they had been wearing seat belts or were protected by approved child safety belts, the council asks that everyone use the belts over the weekend.

Pender demonstrates a simulator which is used in coordination with films as part of classroom instruction.



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