



CHECKING THE POWER SUPPLY — Joe Lidy, left, co-founder of WheelchairHelp.org, checks the power supply on the battery of a recently donated power chair. Looking on is his wife, Darlene, who helped him establish the nonprofit organization.

WheelchairHelp.org provides mobility equipment for those who cannot afford it or who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare coverage. (Photo by Lauren Zeugner)

Darlene, who helped him establish the nonprofit organization.

WheelchairHelp.org continues to grow

By **LAUREN ZEUGNER**
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What started out four years ago as a dream of Joe and Darlene Lidy has exploded into a reality. In the beginning, the organization loaned wheelchairs, offered subsidies and networked with disability organizations.

WheelchairHelp.org was inspired after Darlene Lidy, a polio survivor who walked on crutches for 50 years, was denied a wheelchair and power chair by Medicare because she could walk about 15 feet with crutches causing irreparable damage and pain to her shoulders.

The Lidys tried to find a used power chair, but couldn't find one that fit through their home's narrow doorways. Realizing other people were in the same situation, the Lidys started WheelchairHelp.org to provide mobility equipment for those who cannot afford it or do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare assistance.

WheelchairHelp.org provides wheelchairs, power chairs and scooters at reduced cost. Equipment is either used or has been donated or sourced new from smaller manufacturers at reduced rates. Subsidized savings on new and used equipment is offered. WheelchairHelp.org does not bill Medicare or insurance, or accept any government funding.

Used equipment comes from a variety of sources. WheelchairHelp.org works with most nursing homes in the area. The nonprofit organization will take the nursing home's used wheelchairs, those that are in need of repair, and replace them with one good chair.

The used chairs are rehabilitated at

WheelchairHelp.org's headquarters in Elkhart. The used wheelchairs are restored by volunteers and some professionals to meet a high standard of quality before they are loaned or sold to an individual. Chairs that do not meet those standards, but are still usable are gifted to a missionary organization for restoration at prisons for gifts to individuals in Third World countries.

WheelchairHelp.org is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that survives solely on donations from the community. "A \$100 donation can rehabilitate a power wheelchair worth \$5,000," said Joe.

WheelchairHelp.org offers several programs to clients. Standard wheelchair loaners are available to everyone in the community, free of charge regardless of income or disability. Wheelchairs can be borrowed for up to three months and the term can be extended depending on circumstances, supply and care of the equipment. More specialized equipment such as wide, narrow or light wheelchairs, when available, can be borrowed.

Budget assistance is offered to clients through interest-free financing for up to 50 percent for families who would not qualify or cannot afford traditional financing due to low income or weak credit.

WheelchairHelp.org works with clients to establish affordable monthly payments with some flexibility. Interest is waived for prompt payment.

The Sponsor A Scooter program gifts equipment by assisting clients in raising funds through sponsors such as employees and employers, churches, schools, clubs, friends and family members to help with the cost of a scooter, power chair or wheelchair.

Through their work, the Lidys and their volunteers have "... become sensitive to the unique needs of the giver," Joe said. Often people have wheelchairs or scooters in storage because a family member has outgrown it or has died. Family members then find it difficult to sell specialized equipment due to such high costs.

Donations of equipment to WheelchairHelp.org are tax deductible, but Joe said, "Most people who donate are more concerned that their equipment be reused by those who would not have the equipment due to such high costs, than get the tax benefits." Joe also pointed out it doesn't matter what the condition of the wheelchair or scooter may be. If a chair is in poor condition and can't be restored, it will be salvaged for spare parts.

"We've been fortunate to get a nice balance of salvaged chairs and really nice equipment," Joe said.

WheelchairHelp.org needs volunteers to help transport donated mobility equipment to its warehouse, help restore the mobility equipment, organize the stock of wheelchairs and work with clients to find creative solutions for equipment that will meet their practical needs.

The organization welcomes donations of wheelchairs, scooters, power chairs, bath items, lift chairs, lifts and wheelchair vans, and has a special need for a cargo trailer or two to transport donations from Cleveland, Pennsylvania, St. Louis, Chicago, Wisconsin and Indiana weekly.

For more information about volunteering at WheelchairHelp.org or for mobility equipment, call (574) 295-2230 or (888) 695-2230 or e-mail JoeLidy@WheelchairHelp.org.