

Suburban Life



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Stroke victor refuses to see himself as victim



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

After a suffering a stroke 10 years ago, Bob Battel remains unable to return to work but he's taken on a full-time job as a volunteer helping other stroke patients. For his efforts he was voted by members of the 220 stroke support groups statewide as 1991 Stroke Victor.

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

LIFE WAS SWEET for Bob Battel that day in 1981. He was 46 years old, a healthy 46 except for his high blood pressure. A hi-lo driver for United Wholesale, he was heading home to his wife and family in Southfield.

At the intersection of Seven Mile and Telegraph he discovered his foot was frozen on the accelerator. At the Nine Mile/Telegraph intersection he was unable to brake for the red light and hit two cars, demolishing his own. It wasn't the cuts and bruises that hospitalized him for the next six weeks, however. It was a stroke affecting the left side of his brain, paralyzing the right side of his body.

Following his long hospital stay Battel was enrolled in a round of grueling out-patient rehabilitation at Beaumont Hospital.

"Doctors will tell you rehabilitation will take six months, but it isn't true," Battel said. "It's an ongoing thing."

Battel progressed from a wheelchair to a walker to a single cane, an aid he still uses a decade later. Physically, he's as recovered as he's going to be. He has difficulty controlling the right side of his body and is in constant pain.

"Even today when I read I have to slow myself down or I get into the habit of making mistakes. Everybody's different. I have words in the back of my head that don't come out of my mouth."

"You're never the same person again," Battel said. "I'm not the same person. I can't run. I can't play ball with my grandchildren. But I can smell the roses."

BATTEL HAS NOT been able to return to work. He survives on disability, but he's taken on a full-time job as a volunteer — helping other stroke patients learn to smell the roses. For his efforts he was voted by his peers — members of the 220 stroke support groups statewide — as 1991 Stroke Victor.

Battel is a volunteer for the American Heart Association and is affiliated with three different groups of support groups. He helps with Go For, a stroke recovery support group sponsored by Boisdor Hospital. Different Strokes, which meets at the

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— Bob Battel

BASC Center in Birmingham. And two years ago he was instrumental in launching First Step, a stroke club sponsored by the City of Farmington Hills in its senior center at Mercy Center on 11 Mile Road.

The program is a branch of Kan Doo, another stroke support group said Maggie Loidas, senior adult specialist for the City of Farmington Hills.

"Kan Doo has been around for 10 years," Loidas said. "It's a large organization, whose members like to take trips, have lunch. They've reached a plateau. They've adjusted to their strokes . . . as much as anyone ever can adjust. They don't meet the same needs as First Step."

First Step is smaller, an average of 13 members and their caregivers meet at 1 p.m. each Tuesday in the Farmington/Farmington Hills Senior Center at Mercy Center.

It's a more intimate atmosphere, explained Carolyn Eskandari, mentor of the group along with Battel and Ette Barkholz. "These are the most acute," Eskandari said. "Typically insurance rehabilitation has ended six months after the stroke and they're now on their own. 'It takes an awful lot of courage (to come back out into the world.) Suddenly they're different people.'"

First Step meetings begin with exercises for fitness, flexibility and coordination. "If you don't use it you lose it," Eskandari said. "You'll stiffen and up and become frozen." That's followed by oral exercises, forming words and sounds, since aphasia is a common result of stroke. Time is allotted for word games and reading aloud. Diet and nutrition education to prevent additional strokes is discussed. A heated swimming pool is available for use. And a spinoff caregiver group has been formed.

AND THEN THERE'S the role of

the mentors. That's where Battel comes in. "Bob Battel allows people to see how far he's come," and how far they can come," Eskandari said. "If he sees people in the grocery store who are paralyzed he goes up to them and says, 'have you heard about these programs?' He's a wonderful example. He'll go anywhere to talk to people."

Battel said, "First Step is important because it's a small group. You have the opportunity to open up . . . Talking, that's the idea, to talk about it. When you have a stroke you don't want to hear about it."

"Emotionally I'm OK now," Battel added, "but I wasn't in the beginning. I used to cry a lot," Battel said. One day he came to swim at the Mercy Center and met another stroke victim, who introduced him to stroke support groups. At the same time he began English classes through Farmington Hills Schools adult education.

A short time later he was speaking to stroke survivors with similar problems at area hospitals and the gerontology department at Madonna College.

"We're trying to get away from the idea that these people are stroke victims," Eskandari said. "They're stroke survivors."

"I want them to know it's not so bad," Battel said. "If you've got any value to your life . . . do it for your grandchildren, or if you're young enough your children. I don't want to die. Life is sweet."

First Step is sponsored by the City of Farmington Hills Senior Center but is open to non-residents as well. Transportation is provided to Farmington and Farmington Hills residents with the cooperation of Michigan National Bank's Independence for Life vans. For more information call Maggie Loidas at 473-1822.

Temporary symptoms precede many strokes

A stroke is a form of cardiovascular disease that affects the arteries and veins of the central nervous system and stops the flow of blood bringing oxygen and nutrients to the brain. A stroke occurs when one of these blood vessels either bursts or becomes clogged with a blood clot. About 10 percent of strokes are preceded by "little strokes" (transient ischemic attacks or TIAs). These can occur days, weeks, or even months before a major stroke. The symptoms occur rapidly and last a relatively short period of time, usually from a few minutes to several hours.

The symptoms are like those of a full-fledged stroke, but temporary. People who have had TIAs are nearly 10 times more likely to have a stroke than those who haven't had a TIA.

These are the warning signs of a stroke:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm, and leg on one side of the body.

- Loss of speech, or trouble talking or understanding speech.

- Dizziness or loss of vision, particularly in only one eye.

- Unexplained dizziness, unsteadiness or sudden falls.

Surgery, drugs, acute hospital care and rehabilitation are accepted ways of treating stroke. Successful rehabilitation depends on the extent of brain damage, the patient's attitude, the skill of the rehabilitation team, and the cooperation of family and friends.

Stroke affects different people in different ways, depending on the type of stroke and the area of the brain affected. Brain damage can affect the senses, speech and the quality of understanding speech, behavior patterns, thought patterns and memory. Paralysis on one side of the body can also result.

One of the first rules of successful rehabilitation is that it must begin as soon after a stroke as possible. The

goal of the stroke survivor is to be as independent and productive as possible, given the limitations resulting from the stroke.

Stroke clubs are support groups for those who have had strokes and their caregivers. They serve as a place to exchange practical information and provide a circle of friends

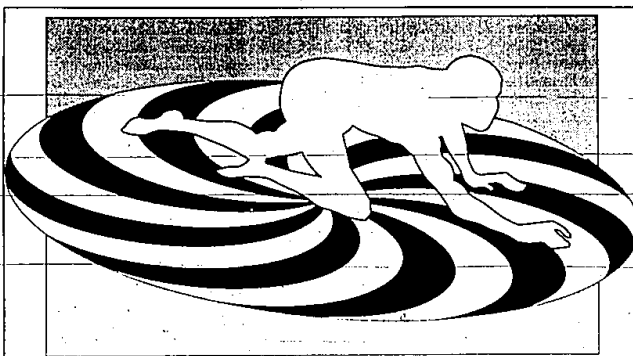
for emotional support. The American Heart Association produces a brochure listing support groups in Michigan. For more information call the state office in Lathrup Village, 557-9500.

The information above was extracted from American Heart Association brochures.



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Bernice Biddick of Farmington Hills exercises her left arm. A stroke left her unable to use her right arm. Biddick is among patients who use support groups to help them recover from a stroke.



TAMMIE GRAVES/Observer & Express

Chronic vertigo spells turn lives upside down

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

Some sufferers have "dizzy spells." Others refer to "vertigo." Many have nausea, noises in the ears, or even hearing loss.

But there is an organization they can lean on, and learn from, the Meniere's Disease and Dizziness Disorders Support Group, which meets monthly at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak.

This month, the meeting will feature world-renowned otologist Dr. Wallace Rubin, who is an authority on Meniere's Disease. He will be flying in from Metairie, La., to talk on inner ear disorders at 6 p.m. Monday in the auditorium of the Administration Building.

Marie Key, a Royal Oak resident, who has Meniere's Disease, organized the support group in 1989. She said that 300 reservations

are filled for Rubin's talk, but anyone interested in the group may contact her at 585-8519 for a recorded message.

Her description of vertigo is horrifying. "The whole room goes around, about 72 mph. The floor, the ceiling go round," she said. "You sit down on the floor, and you can't move off the floor. You have to crawl to the bathroom. You shut your eyes, you feel your brain spinning too."

KEY HAS bilateral Meniere's, in both ears. She said that after her first attack of vertigo she had an attack every day for eight months. Meniere's has been called "the most devastating disease known to mankind," she reported.

Active in the community, she also belongs to the Pilot Club of Greater Birmingham. Key, who is now retired, was working as an ad-

ministrative assistant for three divisions at Dow Chemical in Southfield when she first developed Meniere's in 1980.

She had an operation in 1985, which got rid of the vertigo. However, "Every morning I still have dizziness and nausea," she said.

One group member is Gay Rubin of Bloomfield Hills has Meniere's. She is a fiction writer and the mother of two school-age children. Her first dizzy spell came 20 years ago, and at first she was falsely diagnosed. Eventually, she learned she had Meniere's Disease, which she describes as "a malfunction in the inner ear."

She is not related to Dr. Rubin, who will be the group's speaker, but did fly to New Orleans at one time to consult with him at his clinic.

Please turn to Page 2