

Beeper ball is his game

By Arlene Funk
Staff writer

Ed Bohanon of Canton is a soft-spoken guy who doesn't particularly like to dwell on his blindness.

He'd prefer to talk about the things he enjoys, such as horseback riding and camping with his wife Glee. He does most of the household repairs and many routine chores in the couple's Keystone home.

Still, Bohanon admits that unsighted persons must depend on others for transportation, and are hampered in finding jobs.

That's why he especially enjoys a new-found sport of "beeper ball," a team activity developed for blind persons. Bohanon likes the game because it taps both male and female players of various skill levels.

"YOU'RE EQUAL," said Bohanon. "I enjoy the camaraderie of people who have the same problem as I."

"I don't associate myself with people who are down — blind or sighted," added Bohanon.

Bohanon recently finished his first season playing with the Detroit Area Beeper Ball League. Michigan Bell Telephone Co. developed a battery-powered ball and special bases used in the game.

The ball emits a beep so players can determine its direction. Foam-topped, cone-shaped bases give off a constant hum to let runners know their locations. Sighted spotters warn players when they are ready to run into someone else.

Bohanon emphasizes that he operates in "both" worlds — sighted and blind.

HE BECAME blind in 1969 as a result of complications of diabetes and a car accident. He and Glee had been married only about six months when that happened.

Bohanon left his job as a materials handler at Ford Motor's transmission

plant in Livonia and learned to use a cane, took instruction in Braille and trained with a leader dog.

His wife subsequently took training and became an insurance agent. She took over all the driving chores, which was psychologically tough for Bohanon to accept.

They moved from Canton to Garden City, where the insurance agency was located, but returned to Canton three years ago.

In 1974, with the help of union officials, Bohanon was hired back at the transmission plant — the first totally blind person to work in the factory. He packed parts in boxes, remaining until May 1980, when he suffered neuritis (nerve damage) in his hands.

"ONE OF the hardest things is to make an employer know that handicapped persons and willing to work," he added. "Glee had a pass to drive into the plant (grounds). Everyone was always watching out for me."

Currently, Bohanon does work in the insurance agency, at Ford and Lilly. But he's "casting about for something to do."

Bohanon has been a member of both the Garden City and Canton Lions clubs. He currently is the only blind member of the organization, which raises funds for eyeglasses, leader dogs and other special needs of unsighted persons.

"You're always thinking back about the things you (used to be able to) do," added Bohanon. "The adjustments you make are only to the limit of your imagination."

The Canton Lions Club meets at 7:15 p.m. the second and fourth Thursday of each month in the clubhouse at Honeytree Apartments on Joy Road near Haggerty. Guests are welcome.

Bohanon also speaks to groups about the Lions Club and the needs of blind persons. He can be reached at 981-2781.

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