

Paraplegic doesn't let condition keep him cooped up inside

October 23, 2003 - Wayne Beauvais looks a bit glum right now. Since May he's been confined to his hospital bed, which fills the living room of his tiny apartment in Kitchener.

Soon, he says, he'll be back in his **power wheelchair**, travelling all over Kitchener, avoiding other forms of transport while the weather's good.

Beauvais, 52, is a paraplegic. In the summer of 1974, when he was 21 and a factory worker at then Lear Ziegler, a diving accident changed his life forever.

"I broke my neck. It was hard at first, but I came to terms with it. You accept it. Either that or you give up," he says gruffly.

But the past few months have been tough, he admits. A pressure ulcer means he can't use his **wheelchair**. That was especially hard over the summer. A nurse comes in daily to change the dressing, and he's hooked up to an intravenous tube of antibiotic medication.

He can't wait to be up and about again.

"When I'm in my chair I'm never home," he says. "I go all over, sometimes using the Iron Horse trails, which are partly paved. I don't believe in taking the taxi or bus. I've even gone to Fairview mall from here, just to see if I could do it," he says proudly.

Beauvais lives on Mooregate Crescent, at Victoria and Westmount.

His "chair" is an electrically-powered **wheelchair** which the local chapter of the Ontario March of Dimes helped him purchase 17 years ago.

The Ministry of Health pays 75 per cent of an "assistive device." But that 75 per cent is based on a supplier's quote of 12 years ago, said Jim Parkins, assistive devices administrator with March of Dimes.

A power **wheelchair** costs anywhere from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

"But in reality, the ministry's share covers just 55 to 60 per cent of the price. Also, our clients' Ontario disability pensions haven't increased in 12 years," Parkins said.

Although March of Dimes receives more than \$51,000 from the United Way, the agency must work with other partners to help those people with disabilities who are eligible to receive **wheelchairs**, walkers, bathroom aids and communication devices.

Waterloo Region's social services department helps out at times, as do the Multiple Sclerosis Society and other support groups.

But the United Way is essential.

"Without United Way funding, a lot of people would go without. We would have to raise the money," Parkins said.

As for Beauvais, he says things are far better for him than they were years ago. The Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region -- also a United Way agency -- has an office for support workers in his apartment building. That, with the home help he receives, gives him a measure of independence -- which he appreciates.

"Without it I would still be in hospital," he notes. "The (superintendent) here is good, there's the medical clinic across the street, and grocery stores down (Highland) road. And things are more accessible now. Kitchener is well-ramped."

UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN 2003

Goal: \$5,300,000

Contributions to date: \$2.5 million
Kitchener, Waterloo & townships

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