



PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Terrence Ochotny demonstrates how he transfers his daughter, Linda Hebert, into bed with an automatic lift.



Linda Hebert doesn't let multiple sclerosis stop her from enjoying life.

Going mobile

Lift gives Livonia woman greater independence

STORY BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN | STAFF WRITER

Linda Hebert's life changed for the better on Dec. 8 with the installation of a lift from Project Freedom. The 49-year-old Livonia woman is still confined to a wheelchair, still unable to move her legs, but now can exercise on the floor like everyone else.

Hebert's father, Terrence Ochotny, moves her arms and legs three times a day to maintain as much range of motion as possible. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1976 at age 19, Hebert has gone from pitching on baseball and softball teams to depending on Ochotny to care for her. Until December, he was lifting her 50 to 60 times a day without any help.

Today, with the touch of a button a 12-volt battery provides the power to lift Hebert without his assistance. A manual hydraulic lift sits unused in the bedroom. Its jerky movement makes it unsafe and unpleasant for patient and caregiver.

"With the lift, I can exercise on the floor instead of the bed," said Hebert. "It's more fun.

"The lift is able to take pressure off of my back. When my back gets tired and sore, I sit in the lift for 10 to 15 minutes to relieve the pressure."

Hebert doesn't let MS stop her from enjoying life. In the living room is a stack of videos including one of her favorites, *Snowdogs*. Hebert and her father enjoy watching movies, especially comedies, when at home. Lift Aid 2000 makes it easy. After transferring Hebert to her wheelchair she's off and mobile with the flick of the switch.

Independence is important to Hebert, who cared for herself until 1993. During the early years of the disease, she earned an associate's degree in accounting from Schoolcraft College and worked for Purple Heart even though she's been confined to a wheelchair since 1980.

"This is a blessing for us," said the 69-year old Ochotny, who has arthritis in his spine. "I have to transfer her from the wheelchair to toilet or shower.

"The lift doesn't just make it easier for the caregiver. She can't slide on cloth seats in a car. One time she tore a rotator cuff trying to get in. It's important that people understand the difficulties. You don't understand until you have to deal with it everyday. It's a convenience that's necessary, a safety factor for both parties."

Gilbert Rice has seen the difference the lift can make for individuals with limited mobility due to cerebral palsy, stroke, spinal cord and head injuries, Lou Gehrig's disease, Alzheimer's, and various forms of dementia. Project Freedom currently has 72 lifts in service in metro Detroit. Founded in March 2001, the nonprofit organization lends lifts to individuals without \$5,000 or insurance coverage to purchase the Lift Aid 2000 made in Wixom. Once an application is approved, funding is made possible by the Hospitalers

Committee of Detroit Commandery No. 1, a Masonic organization.

"Lack of insurance, inability to pay, need are the criteria," said Rice, president of Project Freedom. "A committee of Knights Templar, a unit of Masonic Fraternity, decides who to help. The biggest thing is when people are done with it, it's brought back and refurbished and sent out again. We have about 25 on a waiting list. We're only limited by money as to how many we can help."

To contribute or for more information, call (734) 240-2565 or visit the Web site at www.projectfreedom.org.

lchomin@oe.homecomm.net | (734) 953-2145



Terrence Ochotny prepares to remove daughter Linda Hebert from her wheelchair with a lift.



Gilbert Rice looks on as Terrence Ochotny and Linda Hebert prepare to demonstrate the lift loaned to them by Project Freedom.

PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER