



Dave Kammeyer (left) chats with two of his strongest supporters, Heidi Paulsen and Bob Jones, at the HP Vancouver, Washington, site.

You've got a friend

By Joan Tharp

Buoyed by friends at HP and in his community, Dave Kammeyer fights to beat the odds after becoming paralyzed last year.

VANCOUVER, Washington—Sometimes, you're tested far beyond what you believed were your limits. Some days, you get through only on sheer guts and the compassion of friends.

Life changed utterly in an instant last spring for Dave Kammeyer, manager of the prototype department for Vancouver Circuits Manufacturing (VCM) in Vancouver, Washington. While jumping around on a trampoline at a birthday party for his son's best friend, Dave tried a back flip and landed on his head. He dislocated his sixth and seventh vertebrae, which paralyzed him from below the middle of his chest.

At that moment, routine lost all meaning. So many of the simplest acts of being alive from then on were divided into categories marked "yes," "no," "maybe someday" and "probably never."

Because so few people have spinal cord injuries, not much is known about the extent of recovery. Dave is making good progress. At first, he couldn't hold his arm above his head. Now he can do 40 pushups in his chair. Feeling has returned in all of his fingers, and he believes he'll regain use of his hands in a couple of years.

Doctors say his odds of walking again are one-in-a-billion, but Dave is convinced he will walk, either through

willpower or technological advances in treating his injury. During his twice-a-week physical therapy sessions, and while stretching and working out with weights in the Vancouver site gym, he tells himself he'll walk by August. "You gotta have a goal. I may be walking on my hands, but I'll be walking," he says.

Dave's wife, Rachel, isn't that optimistic. But she knows, as does Dave, that attitude affects everything. "So I just tell him, 'You keep working on it, honey. If anyone can make it happen, you can.'"

If sheer tenacity can produce a miracle, Dave will come by his honestly.

He's made it through surgery to realign his vertebrae and stabilize his neck, and a skin problem and a bacterial infection that developed in the hospital. One month after the accident, doctors removed a kidney after discovering it had a congenital defect.

Even after he left the hospital, the trials continued. He had a severe reaction to one of his medications that landed him in the emergency room. In August, he broke his elbow in wheelchair-rugby practice after his chair got caught with another player's and tipped over. (His chair's "wheelie

ing with the kidney meant another operation and the loss of all the progress he'd made in physical therapy. Dave told Rachel he didn't see



Dave works out regularly in the Vancouver site fitness center to build strength in his upper body and keep his limbs flexible.

much of a reason to get up in the morning anymore.

A few days before the surgery, Rachel took him for a walk. She stopped on a skybridge that over-

looked a courtyard. From below rose the sound of cheers as more than 50 of Dave's friends, family and co-workers spotted him.

They hoisted signs and banners that proclaimed, "Hang in there, Dave," "You can do it" and "Your stubbornness will pull you through." Twelve-year-old daughter Jadia and 8-year-old son Simon held up their sign, which proclaimed, "I love you, Dad."

Dave was stunned. Then he began to cry. He studied each face of the friends he forgot he had, and then, overwhelmed with emotion, he asked Rachel to take him away.

The rally at the hospital was part of a wave of support for Dave and his family that eventually swept up hundreds of people at the site and in the Vancouver community.

It started right after the accident when friends and co-workers at the site launched a "Friends for Dave" fundraising campaign and a project to remodel the Kammeyers' house so Dave could get around in a wheelchair. (The project even had a code name: "Homeward Bound.") The fundraising team was led by Heidi Paulsen, an administrative assistant in VCM production, who also sent out regular voice-mail updates on Dave's condition. Bob Jones, a project manager in site facilities and Dave's former boss, managed the remodeling project. "I didn't have a clue how we were going to pull it off," he recalls.

But he knew he had to try, because Dave was his friend and because, he says, after being steeped in HP's culture for 30 years, some things you just do without a second thought. "Every day, you get to practice the HP Way. Sometimes you just get to practice it a little harder," Bob says.

Through bake sales and parties, by selling raffle tickets and "Friends for Dave" buttons, and by auctioning off two manufacturing managers as "slaves" to work the production lines, the "Friends for Dave" fundraisers collected \$12,000 in one month. Meanwhile, the facilities team hammered out the remodeling plans and orga-

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bars," which stabilize it, accidentally had been removed.)

Without question, his lowest point was right before the kidney surgery. He was sick, weak and very thin. Deal-

A friend

nized work crews for weeknights and weekends.

As the news about Dave spread in the community, more volunteers and contributions (some anonymous) flowed in. Tradespeople in the construction industry, some of whom had worked with Dave, offered labor and materials for free or at a reduced cost.

In six weeks, the Kammeyer home had a new first-floor bedroom and bathroom, hardwood floors, wider doorways, and ramps leading to the front door and backyard. Nearly 90 percent of the estimated \$50,000 remodeling job was covered by the contributions and labor of Dave's friends at HP and in the community.

Dave returned home at the end of July and came back to his job part-time in October. He shares managerial responsibilities with Dale Grimes, who ran the prototype department for the nearly six months Dave was out.

It was a scramble to keep the operation going after Dave was injured. His accident occurred just two months after becoming manager of the new organization that builds prototype

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printed-circuit board assemblies for Vancouver Printer and Vancouver divisions.

Jim Stewart, VCM manager and Dave's and Dale's boss, says at times, accommodating Dave's needs and keeping the business going was like driving blindfolded. Like Bob, Jim says he relied on an aspect of the HP



The Kammeyer family—Dave, Jadia, Rachel and Simon—catches up with one another at the end of the day in a favorite corner of the house that was added on during the remodeling.

Way—having respect for the individual and treating him with dignity—to help him make the right decisions for Dave and the team.

Although Dave has enormous resilience, he's characteristically frank about what it's like to go, in one bounce, from being a guy who played basketball three times a week to a guy who has to be rolled over in bed every couple of hours to prevent bedsores.

"There are times you wish you'd just die because it's too hard to do, OK?"

If someone tells you differently, it's a lie," he says.

"All of the things you have to pay attention to just to live day to day, all of the things

you used to take for granted, like eating and going to the bathroom—it's a full-time job."

Most of that job and many others now are filled by Rachel. Every day, she gets Dave and the kids ready, exercises Dave's limbs to prevent his joints from freezing up, and drives Dave and the family wherever they need to go. She's become a familiar

face at the Vancouver site, where she helps Dave open mail and do filing.

"People say, 'I don't know how you do it. I never could.' I say, 'You don't know that, and there isn't a choice,'" she says.

Part of how she and Dave cope is by being upfront with each other about just how hard life has become. They've also honed a twisted sense of humor as a safety valve. Sometimes when Dave gets mad, he'll hit his leg to make it spasm and try to kick her. Once, before they installed a wheelchair lift, she tried to lift Dave into the family van and missed. He slid from her arms and landed on the sidewalk. As friends rushed toward them to help, she looked down at Dave and said, "Was it good for you, too?" The two broke into hysterical laughter.

Of course, Dave can't help getting blue. Sometimes he thinks he's not much of a father anymore. But Rachel reminds him of how he's preparing Simon and Jadia for adulthood. "He's a living example that you can overcome the most difficult things, and still laugh and still love. What a great thing to teach your kids!" she says. **M**