

Standing on her own

No 'limbations' for Lake Villa woman with help of Gurnee firm

By Art Peterson
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GURNEE — When Kristin Anderson regained consciousness after 50 railroad freight cars rolled over her the first thing she saw were her legs 10 yards away.

"Aside from that, I wasn't even scratched," she said of her suicide attempt. She hadn't planned on surviving when she laid across the railroad tracks near her parents' Lake Villa home.

"I lost eight pints of blood; they say that if you lose five, you don't live," she said.

She didn't lose her life, but instead found it and with the assistance of a new foundation, will regain the ability to walk.

It was a bitterly cold January night and the then-17-year-old was despondent over the loss of a grandmother and several friends, and of being victimized by sexual assaults, all in the span of a year and a half. She had lost the will to live and waited for the train traveling at 55 mph.

As she recovered from the failed attempt, she began to ponder: "What am I supposed to do here? He had kept me alive for a reason."

Before, "church was not where I found hope and purpose," but after, that became her new path. "I've grown closer to God," she said. Understanding that her relationship with life now requires helping other people.

She founded the Reaching You Ministry (www.reachingyou.org) to help girls and women beset by depression to find "true joy, happiness and hope in their lives". She speaks before groups and leads volunteers to get people the help they need. Now 24, she is attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and will earn a bachelor's degree in two years. She is looking to become a missionary, as well as continuing her ministry.

On the physical side, she's had no success with old-style prosthetics, which often worsen stump circulation problems, and has been confined to a wheel chair. But the new foundation, "life without limbations," is helping her get modern prosthetics, which will allow her to walk and resume normal activities.

The much-more comfortable prosthetics, which feature vacuum pumps and electric motors, prevent stump pounding.

The one drawback is cost. The units cost upward of \$20,000 per



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Founders of the "life without limbations foundation" Mike McDonough (left) and Dana McDonough (right) with Kristin Anderson, the first recipient of new legs (middle). COVER: Kristen is heading down to the fitting room for her new legs.

leg, just for the equipment, and insurance seldom helps. Each limb requires considerable custom fitting and training for the user.

Donald "Ray" McKinney, owner of McKinney Prosthetics in Gurnee, has been helping, as much as he can, persons who can't afford the limbs. The goal of the foundation is to extend that availability, paying for the cost of equipment, while McKinney and possibly others, provide the labor. Anderson is the first to be helped by the foundation.

"This is real exciting," Ander-

son said Tuesday. "This organization will help me run my organization better."

McKinney expects a quick learning curve, "once the limb is completed, we will just need to get out of her way. The best thing is, the new prosthetics give back independence."

While the limb for her right leg, severed below the knee, has a vacuum pump powered by leg action, her left leg, severed above the knee, required a new design with a 3.5-ounce motor to maintain the vacuum.

LIFE WITHOUT LIMBATIONS

■ The goal of the new foundation, "life without limbations," is to provide modern prosthetics to persons who otherwise couldn't afford them.

■ The foundation will pay for the equipment (one leg costs upwards of \$20,000), and prostheticians like Donald "Ray" McKinney will provide the labor. Insurance generally only covers old-style solid prosthetics.

■ Founder and president is Michael McDonough, who lives near Milwaukee; the executive director is Dana McDonough of Lake Bluff. Persons seeking assistance should send a letter to her at P.O. Box 96, Lake Bluff, IL, 60044.

■ His driving concern has been his brother John (Dana's father), who has had diabetes for 64 years, which led to the loss of one leg; he walks on a prosthesis.

■ Michael said comparing old and new prosthetics "is like night and day. You can wear a modern one all day," he said. "It fits a stump like a comfortable shoe."

■ Another goal of the foundation, John said, is to help young people learn to become prostheticians.

■ McKinney said the need for prosthetics is considerable. "Each year there are 52,000 new amputees in the U.S."