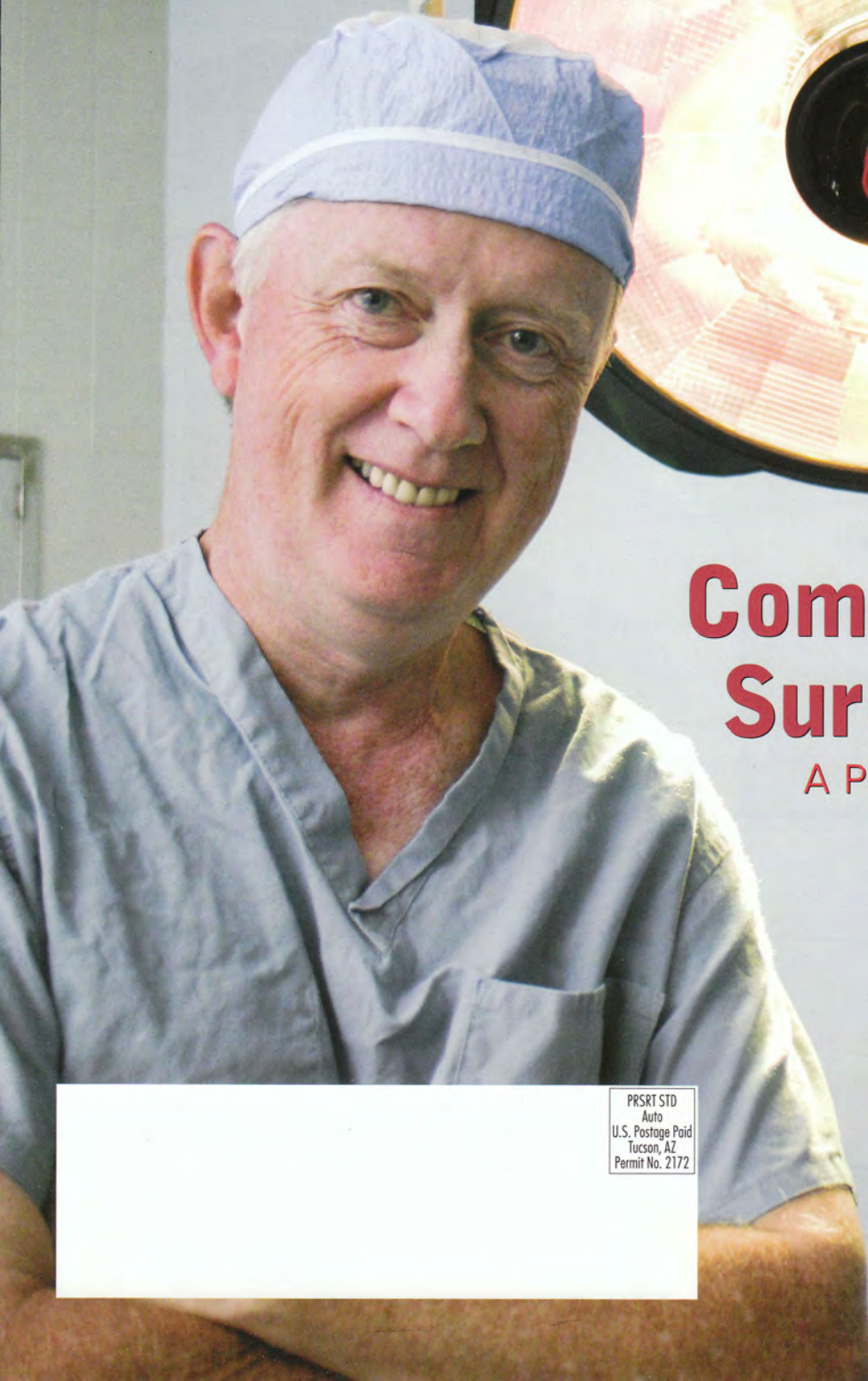


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A Story of Cancer Survivors and Richmond Health Care

Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics Is One of Three Prosthetic Companies That Work With Sheltering Arms Amputee Clinic

By Joan Tupponce

Neither Melanie McElhinney Goodpasture nor Joe Sullivan gets sidetracked by the obstacles that would derail most people. Both are cancer survivors as well as amputees. Their paths crossed when Goodpasture began using Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics (formerly Thomas G. Powell, Inc.) for her prosthesis.

When she was 15, Goodpasture dreamed of dancing on Broadway or in a ballet with the great Mikhail Baryshnikov. It was her passion. Her determination and talent

landed her pre-auditions for the American Ballet Theater and the New York City Ballet Company. During audition practices, however, she found herself in a tremendous amount of pain. "It was getting fierce," she recalls. "I started losing weight and my hair was falling out. I realized something was wrong."

A neurosurgeon confirmed that there was indeed something wrong. Goodpasture had cancer. There was a tumor growing through her pelvis on the sacroiliac crest.

Albert M. Jones Jr., M.D., Medical Director



Dr. Albert Jones of Sheltering Arms

and is a Fellow in the American Academy of Physician Executives. He is past president of the Virginia Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and a member of the Southern Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Richmond Academy of Medicine, Medical Society of Virginia and American Medical Association. When he is not in the office, Dr. Jones enjoys yard work, golf, tennis, church activities, photography and attending his children's sporting events and musical performances. He is married and has three children.

Dr. Jones joined Sheltering Arms in 1988 and has been Medical Director since 1992. His clinical specialties include stroke and other adult neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, postpolio syndrome, ALS and muscular dystrophy. He also has particular clinical expertise and interest in electromyographic medicine, management of spasticity, geriatric spine problems/persistent back pain, balance and gait problems, peripheral neuropathies and prosthetic limbs for amputees. Originally from Memphis, TN, Dr. Jones received his medical degree from the University of Tennessee, and was chief resident at the Medical College of Virginia. He has lectured on the topics of Parkinson's disease, balance and fall prevention in the elderly, arthritis rehab, spine care in the elderly, amputee rehab/prosthetics and state-of-the-art stroke rehab. Dr. Jones is currently an associate clinical professor in the department of physical medicine and rehabilitation of the VCU Health System,



Joe Sullivan of Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics works with Melanie Goodpasture.

She was diagnosed with osteosarcoma. At the time of her diagnosis, 1980, the survival rate for the disease was only 2%.

Goodpasture asked her doctors if she would be able to dance again. She was informed that she had to have a hemipelvectomy, which made it difficult to fit a prosthesis. "That's when I was told that dancing probably wasn't in my future," she says. "I remember looking at the doctor and saying, 'You can do anything if you try hard enough.' The doctor told me I needed to be realistic, but being realistic to me meant being able to dance."

Goodpasture remembers that moment and the thoughts that came into her head: "I am not going to be a cancer victim. When someone asks me what has happened, I am going to say I am a cancer survivor. I will

demonstrate what can happen when the human will refuses to accept defeat.”

After the amputation, Goodpasture did dance again, four months after receiving her artificial limb in 1981. “I was in a recital almost one year after my diagnosis,” she says.

Goodpasture was fitted for her prosthesis by Tommy Powell Jr. “I had such a great fit. I walked better than any other hemipelvectomy patient,” she says. “The only thing that was uncomfortable was the strap around my waist.”

She wore the leg for 14 years until 1992, when she saw parathletes who didn’t wear artificial legs. Recently, however, Goodpasture has suffered back and elbow problems and decided to give an artificial leg another try. This time she worked with Sullivan, now one of the owners of Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics. She knew him from her Paralympics experience.

Sullivan, who has been affiliated with Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics since 1970, was born with a cancerous tumor on the bottom of his left foot. He became a below-the-knee amputee at 6 months of age. “When I grew up, there wasn’t a lot of publicized information on child amputees,” he says. “I felt normal. I did whatever the



Melanie Goodpasture, cancer survivor, amputee, Sheltering Arms board member. A picture of strength and courage.

other kids did. I even played football for club and recreation teams.”

Over the years, Sullivan has competed with the United States Paralympic standing volleyball team in two Paralympic games — 1996 in Atlanta and 2000 in Sydney, Australia — and in six world competitions. In 1998, he was named starting setter and led the U.S. team in the Canadian Championships to their first-ever gold medal.

Sullivan knows firsthand the improvements that have been made in prosthetics over the years. “The one I had when I was young was hard on the outside and the foot component was foam exterior with wood on the inside,” he says. “It was held on by straps and a belt around the waist. The socket was hard. I had to wear a wool sock, even in the summer.”

Foot components today give amputees more spring in their step. “Now, you have computerization, gel liners and carbon composite foot systems,” Sullivan says. “There has been a huge explosion in technology because of the war.”

As part of his job, Sullivan works with doctors and physical therapists at the Sheltering Arms Amputee Clinic. Sheltering Arms started the specialized clinic in 1988. Most of the patients at the clinic are recent hospital inpatients. “They often have complex medical problems that have to be addressed,” explains Dr. Albert M. Jones Jr., Medical Director. “They have

to be medically stable before being fitted with a prosthesis. A physician at the clinic evaluates them when they come in.”

Powell Orthotics & Prosthetics is one of three prosthetic companies that work with Sheltering Arms. “When I go to the clinic, I help the doctor determine the best component for the patient,” Sullivan explains. “For example, if they need a foot component, there are lots to choose from. Some are made for the geriatric population, some for an outdoors person or a sports-related person. It’s like buying a car. We can really customize the component to the patient.”

The Sheltering Arms Amputee Clinic takes a team approach when working with patients. “We work with patients and Sheltering Arms, case by case,” Sullivan says. “In getting the patient ready for the device, we evaluate patients and find out what they were doing before the amputation and what expectations they have. That gives us a blueprint.”

Cancer patients may go through a couple of temporary components before they are fitted for a permanent artificial limb. “Some things are challenging, like learning to control a knee component,” Dr. Jones says. “There are alignment changes. We have to make sure there is no skin irritation. They may come back to the clinic after they get their device to make sure they are using it right.”

Sheltering Arms and Sullivan share a common goal: to get the patient back to doing what he or she was doing before the amputation. “We have a mentoring program at Powell,” Sullivan explains. “We like to get with the patients pre-amputation so they can see that things will be OK. In our field, there are a lot of false expectations. There is a rehabilitation process. Your leg will not walk for you; you have to do the work.”

That’s exactly what Dr. Jones says Goodpasture has done successfully. “She’s really worked hard.” ■

Two of a kind, cancer survivors and amputees: Joe and Melanie share common goals.

