

Limbs of Love to Donate \$250,000 to Aid Amputees

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The Amputee and Prosthetic Center, Houston, Texas, announced recently that it has established a new organization, Limbs of Love, dedicated to providing assistance to amputee patients who are financially constrained and need prosthetic care. "Limbs of Love utilizes the time, skills, and resources of medical professionals and manufacturers who receive no remuneration in an effort to improve the overall quality of life for amputees," said Joe Sansone, CEO of the Amputee and Prosthetic Center. "Through the support of The Amputee and Prosthetic Center, prosthetic manufacturers, and medical personnel from the Houston area, Limbs of Love will be donating as many as 20 prosthetic limbs with a value of over \$250,000 to those who have suffered the loss of a limb and have been previously turned away."

Each year 150,000 people join the ranks of amputees in the United States alone, Sansone noted. Modern medicine and cutting edge prosthetic technology have enabled amputees to return to surprisingly active lifestyles. However, prosthetic care is quite expensive, and many patients lack the financial resources to obtain an artificial limb. These amputees are forced to sacrifice their freedom and independence, and are often never able to perform everyday tasks again.

Unfortunately, due to the high cost of prosthetic limbs, local prosthetic companies are unable to provide free limbs for many amputees. Many of those who have suffered the loss of a limb have lost their jobs because they lack the funds for a prosthesis. After experiencing the frustration of breaking the devastating news to patients and explaining that because of lack of insurance coverage they will never walk again, Sansone decided to fight back. "I just felt sick being forced to continually explain to patients that we were unable to assist them with the cost of a limb, and that they may never walk again," said Sansone. "Through Limbs of Love, we can provide a new sense of confidence for amputee patients to move on with their lives. Health insurance will no longer be the determining factor in who will walk again, who will have a job, or who will be able to care for their family as a result of this organization."

The stories abound of those in need--from the mother who had trouble caring for her children without a prosthesis, the elderly gentleman who had his limb stolen with his car, or the vibrant teenager who lost both of his legs when he was hit by a train, Sansone said.

First Recipient

The Limbs of Love's first recipient, David Reid, will receive his limb February 27 in Houston. Once an active outdoorsman and workaholic, Reid lost his leg after having multiple surgeries on his right foot, and now years later, he is still living without a prosthesis. "I've been literally crawling on my hands and knees in a trailer home too small for a wheelchair for two and a half years," lamented Reid. "I can't work, and I can't do anything I used to do. Before my amputation, I was so active. I used to love to hunt and fish, and really enjoyed dancing. But since this has happened--I'm just kind of 'here.'"

Before his amputation, Reid managed without healthcare insurance. But after suffering the loss of a limb, he had no financial resources for a prosthesis. After repeated attempts to obtain assistance for an artificial leg, he became discouraged with his Catch-22 situation. He couldn't obtain a loan without a job, but he couldn't get a job without a limb. He visited several doctors and prosthetic companies only to be turned away due to the heavy costs associated with the limb. Medical providers were simply unable to absorb the extra expenses. His dreams of walking again were shattered day by day, doctor by doctor.

Reid persevered and decided to, once again, roll the dice and ask for help. He literally hopped into The Amputee and Prosthetic Center. There he met Ben Falls, CP, LPO, who is not only a prosthetist, but also an amputee. "I told Ben my story; he examined my leg and looked me in the eyes," Reid said. "He said to me, 'Son, I won't shoot you down. You'll be hearing from us in a few days. But I guarantee you this--we'll get you a limb.'" Falls had found the first patient for the Limbs of Love project. When asked how he felt when he heard he would soon be walking again, Reid said, "Indescribable! It was such a blessing. Me and my mother just sat there and cried and hugged Ben's neck for ten minutes."

For more information about Limbs of Love, contact Holly Urban at The Amputee and Prosthetic Center: 713.394.9716; hurban@tmcortho.com

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