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HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

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Brown finds the answers

An employer once told John G. Brown Jr. that he had wasted his time by majoring in management information systems.

"He said I would never get a job because of my disability," Brown recalled. "That made me all the more determined."

Today Brown works as a computer assistant in Dorn Veterans Hospital's Information Resource Management Service Department.

Fortunately, the management of the Columbia, South Carolina, hospital focused on Brown's qualifications.

One bad dive

College and a career seemed unreachable to the Great Falls native after a 1982 dive into a swimming hole resulted in quadriplegia.

Brown uses a wheelchair and has very limited hand dexterity.

By his own admission, he "did nothing" for a while. He had no plans.

Then he bought a small computer and his whole outlook changed. He realized he could turn his new fascination into a career.

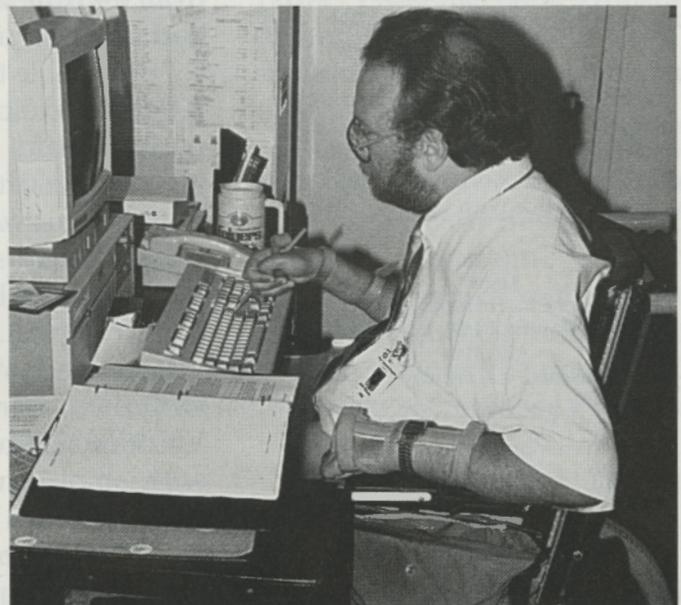
"I knew it would be a challenge, but I also knew it was something I wanted to do," said Brown.

"If I was ever going to do anything, I would have to use my mind. I had always relied on physical strength," added the former textile worker.

Where do you go for help?

Brown turned to the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

The department helps people with disabilities



With the help of adaptive devices and an accessible work area, John G. Brown Jr. works as a computer assistant in Dorn Veterans Hospital's Information Resource Management Service Department.

Dorn Veterans Hospital is located in Columbia, South Carolina.

gain independence through employment.

His counselor, M.H. "Kathleen" Allen in the Rock Hill area office, arranged for his admission to the department's Evaluation Center in West Columbia.

Staff members there then thoroughly assessed his vocational abilities and employment potential.

And, while there, Brown took the SAT and was accepted into a University of South Carolina program for students with severe disabilities. The Transitional Living Center offers residential attendant care, enabling students with severe disabilities to reside on campus and fully experience college life.

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Brown finds the answers

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department provided a power wheelchair to help Brown get to classes and adaptive devices such as wrist splints to help him type on a keyboard.

"At school we did a lot of group projects that helped me make friends. They quickly understood my abilities and didn't dwell on my disabilities," Brown said.

He welcomed that return to the mainstream but also benefited from his time with other students with disabilities.

"Being able to talk to them and get their advice helped pave my path," he said.

However, after graduation, getting a job proved very difficult.

It took 15 frustrating months for Brown to land his job at Dorn Veterans Hospital.

Kenneth A. Walker, a counselor with the Columbia area office of Vocational Rehabilitation, helped with job placement.

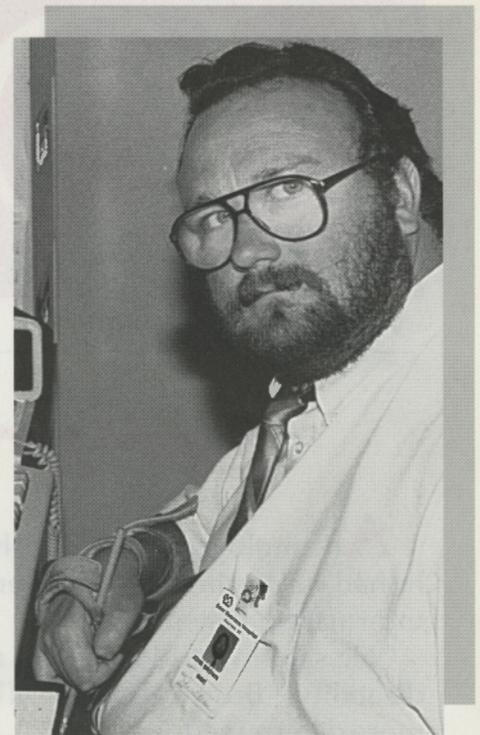
"Sometimes the medical issues and accommodations needs of people with quadriplegia scare employers away," said Walker.

"The VA hospital was sensitive to those needs. And when the opportunity came, John was well-prepared for it."

The VA's high standards for accommodating employees with disabilities made his transition to the working world easier.

"People here are great. They make everything accessible.

"Even in the cafeteria they come out to make sure I get everything I need," Brown said.



John G. Brown Jr.

He also sees improvement in accessibility outside the workplace, for which he credits the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"I can do most of the things I want to do. Places I go are pretty accessible, like the museum and the zoo.

"I don't see how I did it — just sitting around the way I used to. Now, if I'm at home for a day off, I go bonkers," Brown said.

Indeed, he spends most of his spare time on his home computer, where the realization of his dreams began.

"There's hardly anything you can't do on a keyboard," Brown said.

"The keyboard is my access to the world." 

Center staff find clients' potential

Editor's note: In the lead article of this issue of New Horizons, we read about John G. Brown Jr.'s struggle to overcome his disabling accident and to rejoin the working world.

Brown spent much of his time with the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department working with the staff of the Evaluation Center, the nucleus of the department's Center for Comprehensive Programs located in West Columbia, South Carolina.

With this article we delve a little deeper into goings-on at the Evaluation Center.

What is a reasonable goal?

Can I drive?

Will I return to work?

What type of job is best for me?

Using the most modern facilities, equipment and techniques available, staff at the department's Evaluation Center help South Carolinians with severe physical disabilities answer these and many other questions.

They determine if clients with severe physical disabilities can work. And then they help them succeed.

The 30-bed, residential facility located in West Columbia serves people from throughout the state. Fully accessible rooms, the availability of 24-hour nursing care, dining facilities, and scheduled recreation and entertainment activities create a comfortable atmosphere for achievement.

Many clients in the nearby area benefit from the center's day programs, programs that allow them to return home in the evening.

Because each person's needs and goals are different, the Evaluation Center provides individual programs.

However, all clients benefit from the services of the department's Muscular Development Center including aquatic (swimming) therapy, physical therapy, physical fitness exercise and recreational therapy.

Depending on their needs, clients participate in one of the center's three programs: vocational evaluation, pain management or industrial rehabilitation.

Vocational evaluation helps clients identify their interests and aptitudes, physical strengths and weaknesses, level of indepen-

dence, work habits, and goals.

The pain management program helps clients manage recurring pain. Through education, relaxation techniques, exercise, and proper body mechanics (posture, lifting, motion), clients learn to minimize the disabling effects of musculoskeletal problems.

The industrial rehabilitation program (described in detail in a separate article in this issue of *New Horizons*) includes an evaluation of clients' physical capacity using the ERGOS™ Work Simulator and a work hardening (stamina-building) program for those with recent injuries.

VR counselors located across the state refer clients to the Evaluation Center for services.

If you are interested in receiving services, contact the vocational rehabilitation office nearest you.



The Evaluation Center, located in West Columbia, served 513 South Carolinians with severe disabilities during fiscal year 1991-1992.

Program helps injured on the job

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department's industrial rehabilitation program helps people injured while on the job.

Provided by the Evaluation Center, this program includes a physical capacities evaluation and work hardening.

Typically, a client with a job to go back to joins the industrial rehabilitation program within four months of his or her injury.

Participants with orthopedic injuries, most often to the back, knee, shoulder or hip, spend five days a week and eight hours a day in a six to eight week conditioning course.

This step-by-step conditioning uses exercises which simulate job tasks, physical exercise and body mechanics. The clients build their strength as they safely work toward returning to work and preventing future injuries.

Counselors, orthopedists, industrial commissioners and employers refer people to the Evaluation Center's program. And each participant must have his or her doctor's consent.

First the center's evaluators get a detailed description of the client's job. Then they measure his or her physical capabilities with a machine called the ERGOS™.

The ERGOS™ has five panels for measuring the client's ability to perform job-related functions like standing, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching or stooping.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department brought the first ERGOS™ to South Carolina. Even today there are only two in the state.

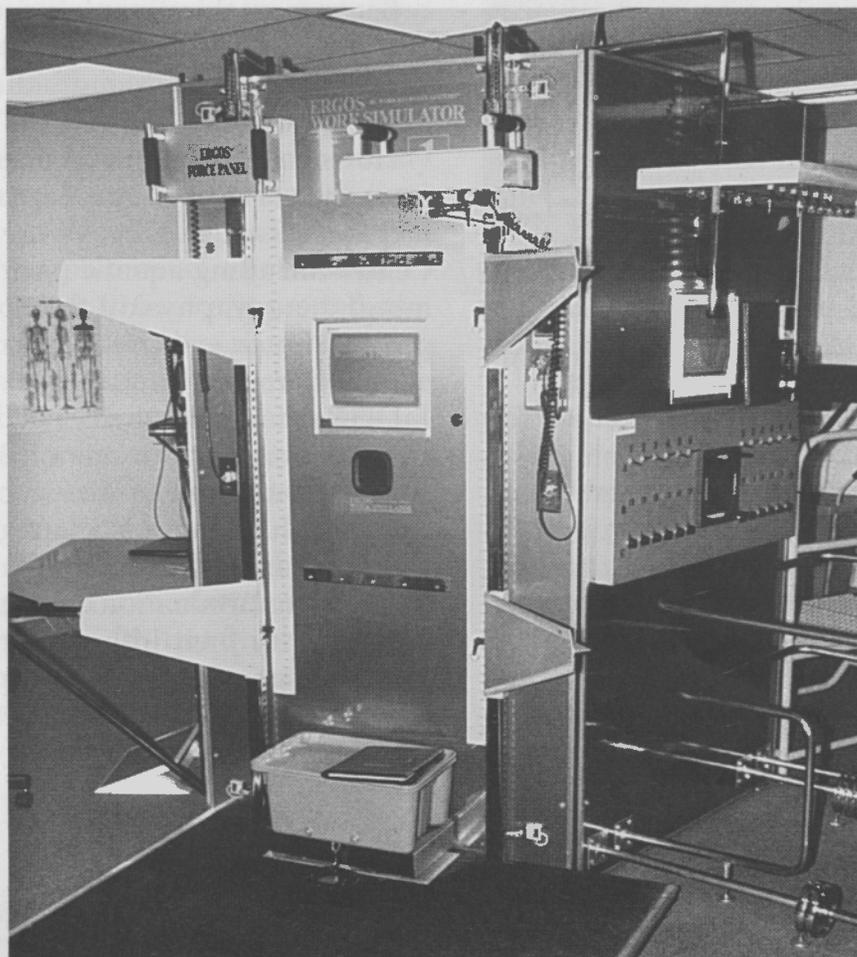
"There have been other simulators, but ERGOS™ is state-of-the-art," said Lucerne W. Iseman, Evaluation Center supervisor.

"ERGOS™ is computer-driven. "It is extremely specific in analyzing the client's physical ability in comparison to the demands of the client's job. And it's very comprehensive in reporting its find-

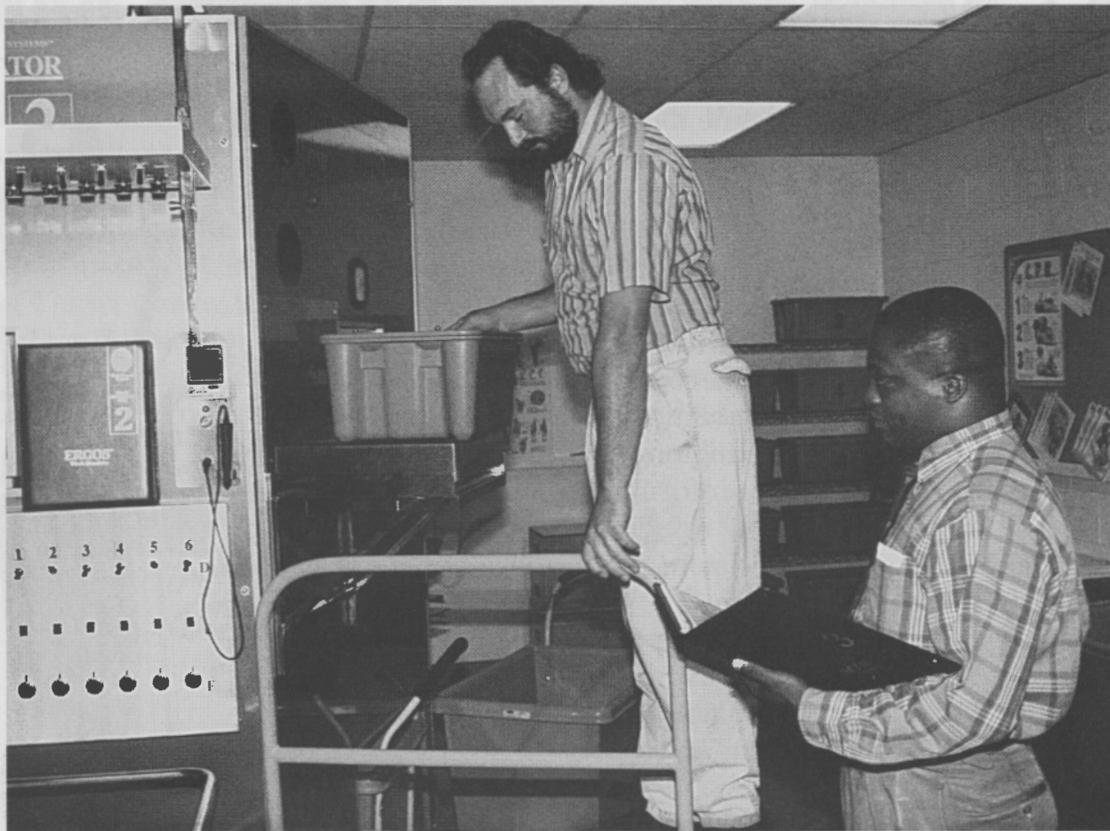
ings," she added.

Indeed, the computer, tied into standardized national data banks like the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, provides pinpoint accuracy as it breaks a job down by worker traits.

If the client's test results fall short of the job demands, but he or she has the potential to regain



The ERGOS™, a computerized high-tech work simulator that Evaluation Center staff members use, identifies the client's ability to perform certain work tasks, i.e. lifting, pushing, pulling and stooping.



W. Bernard Grant, vocational evaluator, uses the ERGOS™ to screen a client for the Industrial Rehabilitation Program.

those capabilities, the staff considers the client a good candidate for industrial rehabilitation.

And the process of slow reconditioning begins.

Using ERGOS™, staff put the client through a series of physical activities, designed specifically to meet his or her functional needs.

ERGOS™, equipped with computerized video and audio systems, gives the client verbal and visual instructions.

The staff also constantly talks to the client during the activities. They ask questions. "Are you feeling tired? Are you feeling any pain?"

These questions allow the client

to rank his or her level of fatigue and pain.

ERGOS™ provides an invaluable service, but the staff provides *the human touch*.

The exercises and physical activities help build the client's strength.

The Evaluation Center also uses aquatic therapy, exercise physiology, occupational therapy and physical therapy with the clients participating in the industrial rehabilitation program.

In addition, the Vocational Rehabilitation Department has a rehabilitation engineer who is available to visit job sites to see if modifications to those job sites might

help the clients return to their jobs.

Iseman says, "One of the unique things about our program is that if the injury prevents the client from continuing his or her old job, we can do a vocational evaluation and try to identify another job that might be available with the same employer. I refer to this as our *safety net*."

"If another job is not available, then we will focus on a new career goal."

And employers?

Employers like the program and often keep jobs available.

Why?

They know they will get good workers and reduce their losses from workers' compensation cases.



Individuals strive for independence at the Center for Independent Living

The South Carolina Center for Independent Living, funded by a federal grant from the United States Department of Education, was established by the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department in 1979.

The center's major objective is to positively impact the lives of people with severe disabilities and their primary caregivers.

Although most of these individuals have little expectation of securing competitive employment, the center offers services which help them become more self-sufficient in their homes, society, communities, work and school. This increases their self-esteem and often decreases the demand on caregivers or attendants.

Center staff and peer counselors work with each individual to help

define the individual's particular needs and identify ways of improving his or her ability to cope with everyday situations.

Peer counselors (selected people with disabilities) teach and share life experiences.

The center provides people with disabilities in Fairfield, Kershaw, Lexington and Richland counties the information and training they need to make informed decisions about what is best for them.

Participants learn about community resources and services available through other organizations and agencies.

People with disabilities can borrow assistive devices and limited mobility equipment on a temporary "as available" basis through a loan program.

Individuals can also learn independent living skills like house-keeping, cooking, budgeting, planning leisure activities, etc.

Participants learn ways of adapting to the barriers which limit mobility and independence in the home and community.

Staff members will also help people locate accessible hous-



ing and teach how to set up a support group.

For more information, telephone (803) 822-5314.

Unfortunately, after 13 successful years, the federal government may, after September 30, 1993, deny these funds to all state agencies, including the Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

As a result, many of the services the center is able to provide today would end.



Company gives quality supplier award to Aiken Work Training Center

The Air Products and Chemicals Inc.'s Langley Plant gave a Quality Supplier Award to the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Aiken Work Training Center during the plant's Quality Day Celebration.

The Aiken Work Training Center packages a variety of contain-

ers for Air Products. The Work Training Center fills one quart to five gallon containers with product supplied by Air Products and prepares the containers for shipment.

Air Products staff commented that the center had done an excellent job of satisfying all of the

company's requirements.

The center packages the containers in a quality manner and delivers them on time, every time.

This satisfies not only Air Products but also Air Products' final customer. 

Greenwood wins beautification award



The Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Work Training Center in Greenwood received a Community Beautification Award from the board of directors of Greenwood County Clean & Beautiful in cooperation with the Beautification Commission.

Photograph by Sam Jones

The board of directors of Greenwood County Clean & Beautiful and the Beautification Commission recently announced the 1992 fall winners of their Community Beautification Awards.

The groups choose the winners from business and industry lo-

cated inside School District 50's geographic boundaries.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Department's Work Training Center in Greenwood received the Government/Industry Division award.

This awards program targets

businesses and industries that boast outstanding grounds, clean entrances, exits, and parking areas; and adequate litter containers.

This contest is an effort to honor Greenwood County's cleanest and most attractive areas. 

Paralympic gold medal winner visits South Carolina

Prominent wheelchair athlete Randy Snow spoke to a group of wheelchair athletes and Vocational Rehabilitation Department clients and staff on December 11, 1992, at the department's Muscular Development Center in West Columbia.

The California resident won a gold medal in wheelchair tennis at the 1992 Paralympics in Barcelona.

Snow gave a motivational talk.

He encouraged the audience to not only participate in sports but also to involve themselves actively in their everyday lives. 



Randy Snow

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