



Courtesy photos

Keeping Up with Wes

Radford Department of Occupational Therapy helps the differently abled get back to their lives.

By Dan Waidelich

For Wes Price, an active lifestyle is the only option.

Whether Price, an Air Force veteran from New Castle, Virginia, is doing 20 miles on his bike, spending warm days kayaking on the river or taking pictures around the New River Valley, he remains always in motion.

Not too bad for a man recovering from a debilitating stroke.

Four years ago, Price suffered a stroke, which affected the left side of his body, leaving him with little movement and stunted speech. Today, Price has made incredible strides in reclaiming his motion and voice, partly with the assistance of Radford University's Department of Occupational Therapy (OT).

"I needed one to two years to talk," Price said of his vocal abilities. Of his arm movement, he had just as much of a hurdle. "My arm, it was dead."

Occupational therapists are health care professionals who help clients with special needs learn or relearn how to take care of themselves in daily life. From broken bones to more serious issues, such as Price's debilitating stroke, occupational therapists do their part in making life easier for their clients.

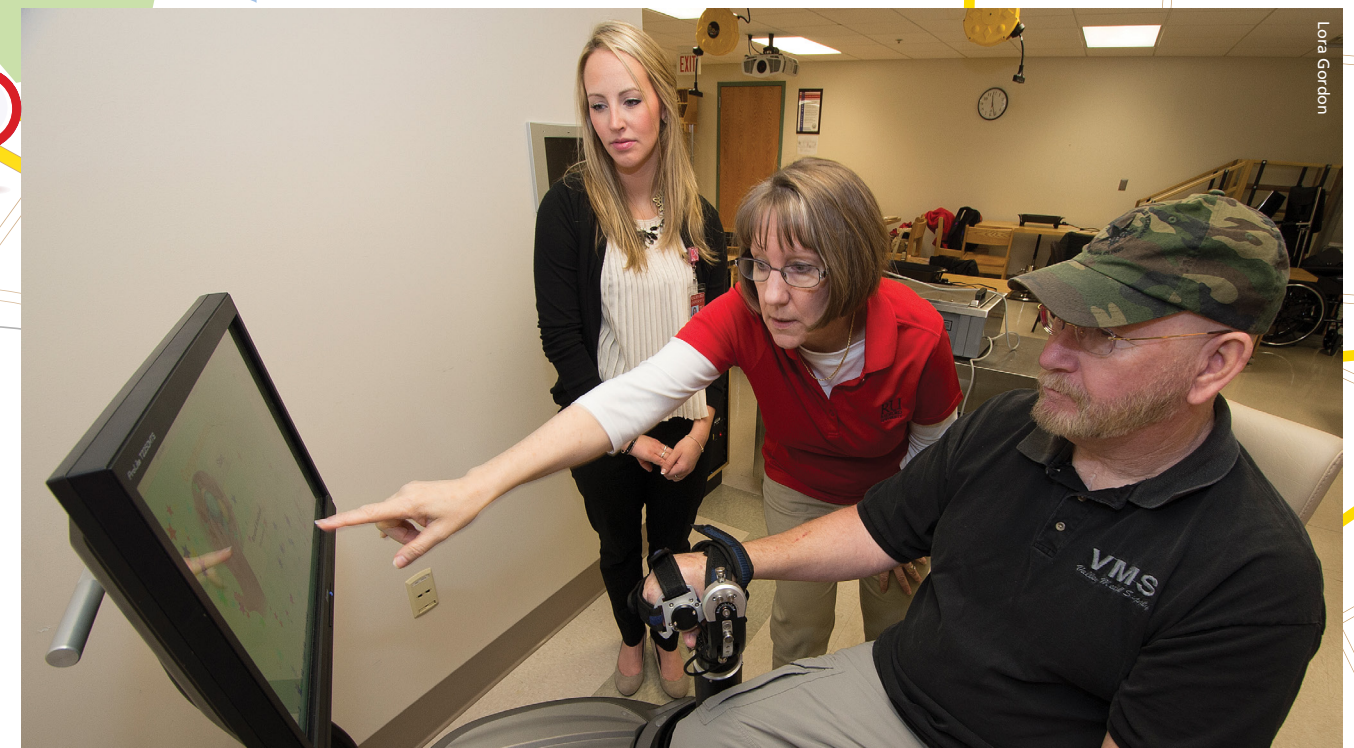
"A big goal of [Price's therapy] has been getting him back into doing the

things that he used to do before the stroke," said Sheila Krajnik, assistant professor of OT and one of Price's therapists. "We also want to facilitate his ability to be satisfied with how he can do it."

Currently, Radford University offers a master of occupational therapy degree. The mission of the OT program is to prepare students for a career in helping to rebuild lives and encourage and improve the capabilities of those they work with.

"A stroke affects people so differently," Krajnik said. "For Wes, his thinking is fine, but it's his body that needed help."

After the stroke, Price's left arm was nearly immobile. Through extensive therapy, his range of movement increased. The range keeps growing with each OT session. In a typical



Occupational therapy student Patience Cantrell observes as Sheila Krajnik talks with Price in RU's OT lab about a dexterity game he plays on-screen, one of many rehabilitation exercises he does to regain his mobility.

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hour-long session, Price works with a machine with a large handle. When he manipulates the handle, the movements are shown on an attached monitor. That monitor can also tell him where to move the handle, giving his arms a workout designed to win back movement. A computer tracks his success and shows him improvements from session to session.

"We celebrate the small successes," Krajnik said.

Aside from just being able to move, an important part of the rehabilitation is working on speed and control. Machines like the ones used in the OT department can deliver the precise directions and multiple repetitions that clients like Price need.

Even though Price hasn't gained back all the movement he lost, he has found that with the right assistance, he is still

able to maintain his active lifestyle. He lives on his own and is still able to drive himself where he needs to go. A recumbent tricycle allows him to take the same long rides as a two-wheeled bike. Text-to-speech applications on his phone and tablet help him fill in his speech when needed. And a specially designed paddle grip for his kayak helps him enjoy the river.

One of the OT students who has worked with Price and Krajnik is second-year Kate Burch, of Christiansburg, Virginia. Burch worked with the professor to produce Price's paddle grip. The design for the custom neoprene grip came from Price; Krajnik and Burch located the materials and made it for him.

"We had to consider a variety of factors including function, comfort, safety and feasibility when creating the

paddle grip," Burch said.

Working with actual clients like Price is an important part of OT education at Radford. These experiences take learning from the textbook pages into the practical realm.

"Working with clients helps you to apply the information and skills that you are learning in class to real-life situations," Burch said. "This, in turn, helps you to better understand and retain the course information and skills."

Those skills will undoubtedly make a difference in the lives of patients. OT sessions at Radford, with Krajnik and students like Burch, have certainly helped Price live independently and actively.

One of his latest adventures? In March, he and some fellow differently abled veterans hit the slopes in Aspen, Colorado.

What have you done lately? ■