

FACING VISION LOSS Fairfield man hopes to open therapy business

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Zone 2:

Opposites

do attract

By LYNN ASCRIZZI

Staff Writer

Since age 25, the world of sight has been slowly fading for David Perry of Fairfield.

"I can't tell what my wife looks like anymore. I couldn't tell her eye color. I can see some general details. I rely on voice," he said.

Perry, 37, has a degenerative, inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa (RP) that affects light-receptive cells on the retina.

"It can skip several generations; I never recall having night vision," he said.

The disease has left him with blurred tunnel vision.

"With a lot of difficulty, I can read 14-point type (about 2 3/8-inches high), for a short period of time. It turns into twisted, squiggly lines that don't resemble words. Glare is a huge issue with RP. Fluorescent lighting is one of the worst," he said.

Now, he is confronting the two big hurdles faced by every person with vision loss.

"Transportation -- it's so huge. It's on top of the list. And, employment. Central Maine is hit the worst. We don't have public transportation," he said.

For Perry, an active, sociable guy with a strong will, technical know-how and an inventive streak, that means a battle on many fronts.

"I'm fiercely fighting my way through frozen ice," he said.

A licensed massage therapist since 2004, he is also trained in myofascial release, a therapy that releases pain in the muscle's connective tissue. For 18 months, he treated clients at Orthopedic Therapy Associates (OTA) in Waterville. Then, he got laid off with six other employees.

Since then, he has struggled to get his therapy business off the ground. The ideal scenario, he said, is to find an affordable home with an attached

room and separate entrance and bathroom, to set up an office. That would solve the work place and transportation problems.

Currently, he shares a rented house with his wife, Julie, who works with Kathy's Cleaning Service in Albion, and their daughter, Kerri, 16. But that home does not offer the desired features, so the Perrys are looking to buy a home. They have been preapproved for a \$93,000 home loan, he said. "I'm keeping my ears open. But even in Fairfield, it's not good," he said, of housing prospects that fall within that price range.

Another hurdle. The massage therapy market in Maine is oversaturated. To create a niche market, Perry hopes to complete training in neuromuscular therapy, a specialized form of manual therapy useful in relieving pain. His goal is to take a 13-day, fast-track programs at Paul St. John Institute, Pinelass Park Florida. But right now, the \$6,000 program cost is prohibitive.

Although certain goals are on hold, Perry has boosted his office skills, recently, through a world of innovative computer technology available for those with vision loss.

This spring, he was trained in adapted computers and software programs in the Computer Access Technology Center at the Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, Pa.

There, he received instruction in the screen-reading program, "Jaws for Windows." Now, he can read e-mails, get on the Internet and do documents and spreadsheets. He also learned "Open Book," a software program that reads scanned text.

Perry has also tapped into his inventive side and created spreadsheets and electronic forms for nonvision users.

"They're honed down -- as simplistic as possible. I've designed about 10 different medical forms for work-related injury questionnaires, client-intake forms and expense revenue ledgers," he said.

In the process of learning Braille, he plans to Braille-label items like CDs, tools and household items by using a special, hand-held Braille labeler, he said.

An active guy who enjoys gardening, he built three, specially designed raised garden beds of hemlock.

"The raised beds are designed for height and mobility -- ergo-garden beds," he said, of the ergonomic design.

The project was so satisfying, that he plans to acquire a skill saw with special guides and guards and a measuring tool called Quick Rule, that clicks every 1/16th of an inch, he said.

"A friend of mine who is totally blind, Gene Monahan of Bangor, builds fine furniture all by feel. He has been trained to use special tools," he said.

Living with a person who is visually compromised has its challenges, his wife said.

"We have to accommodate, which isn't always easy. We have to deal with low lighting. Moving furniture or shoes in doorways -- it's one thing you don't do," she said.

Her go-getter husband is not the kind to sit around the house, she noted.

"He has a great mind. It should not be wasted. He has all this knowledge -- all this going for him -- and no one is looking for him," she said.

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Eric Foster of Benton, ME

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I spent 10+ months at OTA while recovering from a little fall from a dirtbike. While David wasn't directly working with me, I saw him there often. His demeanor and skills while working with others is far above par, as was anyone associated with OTA. He is very driven, often walking to and from the facility instead of allowing anyone to give him a ride, even if they were already going his way. If I ever needs a stint of therapy again, I can only hope I can involve someone the likes of David to help me through.

I wish you luck David, keep up the great work!

About the Author

From morningsentinel.mainetoday.com:

Included is consumer information, event listings, job postings and exam information while promoting excellence in orthopaedic manual.

There is not enough evidence to draw a conclusion about the effects of manual therapy by physiotherapists and chiropractors for adults.

This degree is offered to qualified physiotherapists who wish to develop their clinical reasoning and techniques in the area of manual.

Manual Therapy is the use of the hands to diagnose and treat illness and maintain health. This collection of books and articles documents.

Provides guidelines on the provision of safe and scientific manual, mobilization and manipulation.

The Manual Therapy Online Column is written or edited by Jim Meadows. The column is dedicated to ongoing events, both political and clinical.

Publisher of books and journals in manual therapy for professionals, lecturers.

The Graston technique is a form of soft tissue mobilization designed to break down the scar tissue, as well as stretch connective tissue.

Source: <http://www.productsherbal.com>