

Man about town

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 19 August 2010 13:11 - Last Updated Thursday, 19 August 2010 13:14



Cerebral palsy, diabetes don't slow him down.

Orange flags fluttering behind him, he zooms down city streets in his motorized wheelchair he's affectionately named "Big Bird."

At Peterson's Supermarket, he waits for someone to open the door so he can collect groceries in a bag attached to his chair.

The 53-year-old is a common sight at high school sporting events and attended the spring Husker football game with his church family.

If you haven't met Gary Everitt, now's your chance.

Born with cerebral palsy, Everitt was diagnosed with diabetes five years ago.

But this man-about-town doesn't let those conditions get in his way even though cerebral palsy affects his speech and ability to walk.

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Interestingly, the most difficult part of living with his disability, Everitt said, is not being able to eat sweets.

“I can have diet stuff but I miss chocolate chip and sugar cookies,” he said with a grin that grows across his face.

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For the last five years, Everitt has called Gothenburg home.

When he’s not out and about, he lives in a cozy Hillcrest apartment with help from a caregiver.

Chris Vanhorn cooks breakfast and dinner, gives him his diabetes injections and baths, gets Everitt up in the morning and puts him to bed.

For lunch, he receives Meals on Wheels.

Sometimes, Everitt admits to having to deal with low blood sugar.

“When I’m out, I sometimes forget to eat or drink but people will stop and offer help,” he said. “Juice or anything sweet.”

Because he has difficulty speaking, Everitt uses a communication device called an Allora.

Everitt types letters on the Allora that spells and sounds out what he’s trying to say.

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“It changed my life,” Everitt said about the device he discovered at a disability trade show seven years ago.

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While a ward of Nebraska, Everitt lived in Kansas City, MO, where he attended grade school and junior high through 10th grade.

Everitt has two sisters and one brother. Another brother died. Most of his family lives in Lawton, OK.

He moved to Lincoln when he was no longer a state ward and became eligible for social security.

Everitt then worked toward his GED which he received and later took college courses in Lawton.

“I thought about majoring in journalism but didn’t stay in college because of transportation issues,” he said. “If I had stayed, I probably would’ve switched to something in computers.”

Until he was 19 years old, Everitt could walk fairly well before a stroke made it more difficult.

At 21, he married but after five years became single again and started to use a wheelchair because he felt safer.

For a time, Everitt lived in Lincoln and worked at Goodwill Industries.

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“I hated it,” he said, noting that the program is for people with mental disabilities and for those recovering from accidents. “I went as far as I could in the program until

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