

JANE BRODY

Whether you swim in a river, lake, ocean or pool, the last thing you want afterward is a "recreational water illness," an infection or irritation caused by germs or chemicals contaminating the water. **B3**

GOING SWIMMING WITH KIDS? HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Lifeguard Kathleen Johnson of the O'Fallon, Mo. Family YMCA, talks about five precautions every parent should take with their children at the pool. STLhealthandfitness.com



Johnson

Personal touch aids chronically sick kids

In the hospital • Nurse navigator in new program at Mercy Children's Hospital helps families solve problems.

BY BLYTHE BERNHARD

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It can be tough to get a pediatrician on the phone at any time, or to know when a sick child needs to go to the hospital.

Nurse navigator Moe Schmid helps parents manage their children's chronic health problems by working as a liaison among the hospital, primary pediatricians and families. Since January, she's been enrolling children in a new program at Mercy Children's Hospital in Creve Coeur called Pediatric Outpatient and Inpatient Navigation Team.

Schmid helps parents and pediatricians design a care plan for children with complex health issues including traumatic brain injuries, cerebral palsy, cancer, Down syndrome and complications of prematurity. The goals of the program are to reduce the hospitalizations and lengths of stay for these children as well as coordinate their care and therapy through a home base at the hospital and its clinics.

Each day, Schmid completes rounds in the hospital's emergency room and neonatal and pediatric intensive care units to check on inpatients. Then she makes calls to families to check in on other kids at home.

Schmid, a registered nurse, helps the families coordinate their appointments and medical records among various medical specialists. She even keeps track of women with high-risk pregnancies to establish a rapport with families in case their children require long-term medical care.

One woman from North Carolina unexpectedly gave birth to twins prematurely while visiting St. Louis. After the babies were released from the hospital, Schmid has continued to follow up on their well-being at home in North Carolina.

"My care doesn't stop when they leave the hospital," Schmid said. "The goal is to basically make sure that these kids who tend to consume the most resources, that they're getting the resources they need, that things aren't missed in their care."

The program is free to families and funded for three years with \$200,000 raised at a St. John's Mercy Foundation benefit. Before launching the program, Schmid attended a training seminar at Akron Children's Hospital, which runs a similar program.

Mercy Children's expected to enroll 75 kids in the program the first year but has already reached an active roster of 127 children. Hospital officials have said they think the program gives them an advantage over St. Louis Children's Hospital and Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center by providing families with coordinated care.

To gauge if the program is working, hospital staff will track the number of emergency room visits, hospitalizations, medical costs and satisfaction among the enrollees.

Catara Robinson, 5, has needed constant care since nearly strangling herself on a window blind cord and experiencing a severe brain injury three years ago. The girl is on a ventilator and often gets infections because of the tracheotomy tube.

With Schmid's help, Catara's mother, Tiara Robinson, is able to recognize the infections more quickly, start Catara on antibiotics and avoid a hospital admission. Since entering the program a few months ago, Catara has not needed an overnight stay in the hospital.

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Six String Heroes

Group of volunteers teaches troubled veterans how to play the guitar, soothe feelings.

BY CYNTHIA BILLHARTZ GREGORIAN

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When Army Sgt. Nate Shumaker is playing guitar, he's not thinking about May 4, 2010.

That's the day a mortar round landed in his gun pit in Afghanistan and exploded, taking off his left leg just above the knee.

"It keeps my mind occupied right now and not thinking about it," Shumaker, 25, of Barnhart, said. "I'm thinking about what chord to go to next."

He and guitar instructor Steve Stoner had just finished strumming along to a digital recording of Waylon Jennings' "Luckenbach, Texas" one evening at the Veterans Administration at Jefferson Barracks.

"That's a hard one to start with," Stoner said. "Get that one mastered, and you won't have a problem with too many songs."

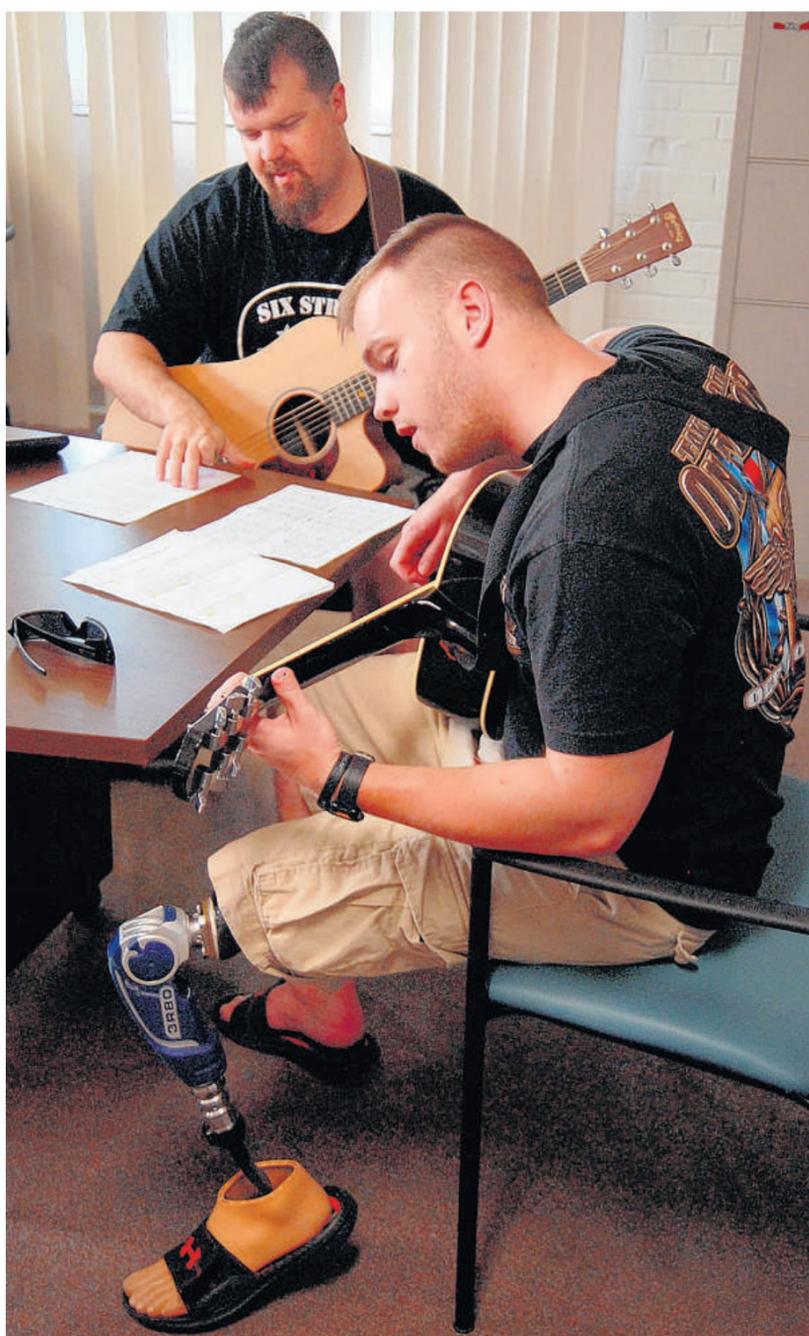
Stoner is one of seven volunteers with Six String Heroes, who teach veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to play guitar.

They do it, their mission states, because they "believe music has the power to restore the soul." Many of the vets they've taught would say that's true.

Derek Milles, a co-founder of the group, was in treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder from a year spent serving as an infantryman in Iraq.

After returning from the war, Milles, 29, of Mehlville, a sheet-metal worker, withdrew from family and friends by moving to Franklin County for two years, he said. He was having a hard time dealing with the things he'd seen: buddies killed, decapitated bodies, a six-ton Humvee blown 30 yards.

"Nobody thinks it's going to happen to them, seeing stuff,



SID HASTINGS

Army Sgt. Nate Shumaker (right), 24, who served in Afghanistan, works with instructor Steve Stoner as part of the Six String Heroes program at Jefferson Barracks.

Watch a Six String Heroes practice session at STLtoday.com

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Pregnant smokers are targeted

New campaign by March of Dimes sponsors ads in city, encouraging moms-to-be to quit.

BY MICHELE MUNZ • mmunz@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8263

Just as new research released this week shows a strong link between smoking and birth defects, the Missouri March of Dimes is launching a campaign aimed to get pregnant women in St. Louis to stop smoking.

Advertisements are going up this week in 13 bus shelters across the city, and 15- and 30-second radio spots began playing last week on stations most

likely to reach women ages 18 to 34 who live in the city.

The ads encourage women to call a state hotline which connects them to "free and confidential" programs to help them quit. Last year, Missouri approved \$3.2 million to pay for smoking cessation programs for those on Medicaid, the state and federal health program for the poor. Another \$5 million

will come in federal funds. Teens and pregnant women will be given priority.

The ads also get the word out about the underused hot line, said Missouri March of Dimes communications director Richard Buckley. "Just slightly over 100 pregnant women in the whole state of Missouri called the hot line for

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Trucker gets serious about weight loss

How I Did It • Program at Washington U. helps him change mental approach, lifestyle.

BY JOSHUA NICHOL-CADDY • jnichol-caddy@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8242



ERIK LUNSFORD • elunsford@post-dispatch.com
Gerald Niedzwiecki works out at Gold's Gym in O'Fallon, Ill. His wife died after gastric bypass surgery in 2008, making him become more determined to lose weight and become more fit.

Gerald Niedzwiecki, 46, planned to have gastric bypass surgery in January 2009. That changed in November 2008, when his wife died a month after the same procedure.

He said it took him a year and a half to "figure it out." In June 2010, weighing 438 pounds, he took a leave of absence from his job as a truck driver and moved from Nevada to Missouri. Here, he would be surrounded by family and friends as he undertook the challenges of losing weight and getting healthy.

A year later, he has lost nearly 170 pounds through diet and ex-

GERALD NIEDZWIECKI

Age • 46
Home • Caseyville
Occupation • Truck driver
What he did • Lost about 170 pounds since June 2010
How • Quit work to focus on his health and enrolled in Washington University's Weight Management program.

ercise. Although he said he "hates gyms," his first step was starting

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JULY'S THE MONTH TO CELEBRATE ICE CREAM AND BAKED BEANS

Not together, of course, but this month is National Ice Cream Month and National Baked Beans Month. Take our quiz celebration two all-American foods at STLhealthandfitness.com



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