

Ministry fuels miracles of mobility

BY JOY LUCIUS

The day began as a thousand others. She awoke, dressed herself, fed her baby, and strapped him to her back. She postponed it as long as possible, but it was time. Time for her daily trek.

Summoning courage and stamina one more time, she crawled out of her tiny hut on hands and knees to make her way to the water pump. Crawling through dirt and grass, through briars and rocks and insects, she dragged the small water jug behind her.

Pumping water was difficult enough, and simultaneously filling the jug was almost impossible. Add to that the weight of her precious baby and the haughty disdain of other village women scattering as she approached the pump. She sighed, finished her task, and headed home, retracing the familiar path.

Focused on facts

Mobility. Most take it for granted. Most of the western world can choose from a wide variety of transportation options, private and public alike. Yet,

over a billion of the world's inhabitants still have no access to an all-weather road, much less own a vehicle.

In fact, more than two billion women around the globe walk (or crawl) more than three miles daily just to get water for their families. If crawling to get water seems unbelievable in our modern world, keep in mind that normal, upright mobility is impossible for an estimated 70 million handicapped people.

The volunteers and partners of Mobility Worldwide are devoted to bringing the gift of mobility and dignity to each of those 70 million individuals, as a direct and tangible reflection of God's love.

They plan to accomplish this goal by freely distributing simple, sturdy mobility carts (sometimes described as industrial-style wheelchairs) in underdeveloped nations around the globe.

AFA Journal spoke with Scott Walters, executive director of Mobility Worldwide, and he explained that each mobility cart is an indirect extension of the Great



Commission.

"We don't necessarily evangelize with words out in the field, but through our deeds, by providing a very sturdy mobility cart, we are changing peoples' lives in the far reaches of the world," said Walters. "And the people that we help are, for lack of a better term, 'the least of these' that the Bible speaks of" (Matthew 25:40).

Founded on need

Mobility Worldwide began in 1994 strictly out of a specific need. When Larry Hills, an American missionary to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), alerted Pastor Mel West, a man he thought would be moved by a dire need in Zaire. Hills told the pastor he needed many three-wheeled, sturdy wheelchairs with hand cranks for polio and landmine survivors he often encountered.

West was, indeed, interested. He contacted Earl Miner, a long-time friend and product designer from Columbia, Missouri. Miner began designing the prototype of a mobility cart that could withstand Zaire's rough terrain. Soon, Miner had four test carts ready to send to Hills with instructions to put them in the worst places imaginable to see if the carts would pass the test.

Those first PET Carts – Personal Energy Transportation Carts – were a definite success, so production and



...the people that we help are, for lack of a better term, 'the least of these' that the Bible speaks of.

SCOTT WALTERS

shipments began immediately. From his basement and donated space in a local church, Miner and other volunteers built each component of the carts and then shipped them partially assembled. Before distribution, Hills' team in Zaire easily completed assembly of each cart's simple components.

Miner's cart-building group in Columbia became the first of 23 production sites, 21 in America and 2 abroad. In 25 years, volunteers at these 23 sites have built and delivered over 70,000 carts worldwide to people needing mobility.

Still built by hand at a cost of only \$300 per cart, the design has improved over the years, as have production, shipment, and distribution methods. But one thing has remained the same: Mobility Worldwide is powered strictly by the compassion of Christian volunteers and ministry partners.

"Unlike most ministries, our volunteer corps is well over 90% male," Walters stated. "The majority of these men have retired from a career in the trades where they might have fashioned or fabricated metal, worked as plumbers or mechanics. They are very comfortable working with machinery.

"They fully understand the impact of their efforts, especially when they travel and deliver their handmade carts to people in need. With tears in their eyes, volunteers thank me for Mobility Worldwide transforming their retirement. Now, they have schedules, they have goals, we

need them, and they need us. It's life-changing."

Fueled by faith

To get a firsthand look at this life-changing ministry, AFAJ visited the Memphis, Tennessee, affiliate of Mobility Worldwide, and spoke with Mark Griffy, who founded and faithfully oversees Memphis Mobility.

"I was retiring and needed something to do, so I visited a Christian men's conference in Nashville with booths set up offering different ministry opportunities," Griffy said. "Every time I walked by the Mobility Worldwide booth, something stopped me. One time, someone spilled a drink, so I helped clean it up. Over and over, something like that happened. Finally, I said, 'I get it, God, This is the one.'"

It's amazing to see the body of Christ pull together to make these carts ... we put it all together from the ground up and get it ready for shipping.

HUBERT DAVIS, LOCAL VOLUNTEER

Initially, Griffy and his home church members raised \$3,000, enough money to build 10 carts. Mobility Worldwide came and helped the church members build the carts on site. That first encounter was all it took. Griffy opened the Memphis affiliate, then started building carts with the help of local volunteers, men such as Hubert Davis and Ed Morgan, who


owns the Memphis affiliate's building and offers its use at cost.

Touring and observing each step of the Memphis production assembly line, Davis explained that volunteers follow a standard blueprint to assemble, test, and then disassemble each cart to fit into a large shipping container. All of the raw materials used to build each cart are donated, except for nuts, bolts, and plastic handles.

"It's amazing to see the body of Christ pull together to make these carts," said Davis. "Our wood comes pre-cut and ready for assembly from a family business in Arkansas, another guy does the welding, and someone else makes the seats. Then, in here, we put it all together from the ground up and get it ready for shipping."

Memphis used to ship the carts via trucks to ministry partners such as Samaritan's Purse or Kenya Relief. (See sidebar below.)

In turn, each partner ministry was responsible for its own overseas shipping. But they discovered shipping directly to each partner distribution site saves thousands of dollars per shipment. Now, once through customs, the carts are reassembled on site and distributed one by one to their new owners.

"That's the amazing part, seeing the carts delivered," said Griffy. "People use the cart to start a business, go to school, or just do daily chores. Whatever the case, they come crawling in or carried in by someone else, but they leave on one of these carts, truly mobile for the first time in their lives." 



Give lives new freedom

Mobility Worldwide offers cart-building workshops, field trips, mission trips, and other ministry opportunities to churches, individuals, businesses, youth groups, and civic organizations.

Learn more at mobilityworldwide.org or call 678-756-1882.

Watch this video of a 2017 mobility cart distribution event at Brittney's Home of Grace in Kenya: youtube.com/watch?v=2Nn-B9FQnPg.