

Disabled BC3 grad, employee collects 82 mobility aids for impoverished abroad

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Robert Olszewski, 47, a student technical specialist at Butler County Community College, is shown Friday, March 19, 2021, with a portion of the 82 canes, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs he collected over the course of a year and stored in his storage facility in Butler. The mobility aids will be refurbished by inmates in Washington state and ultimately benefit Third World residents longing for personal mobility. Olszewski is also a 1996 BC3 graduate.

(Butler, PA) They crawled in dirt, were carried on backs or pushed in wheelbarrows toward the clinics distributing free canes, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs.

Motivated by a nonprofit organization's videos of Third World residents longing for personal mobility, a Butler County Community College employee with cerebral palsy collected mobility aids from four western Pennsylvania counties that by the first day of fall will change lives.

His storage facility now vacant after watching his first shipment of 82 canes, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs received from individuals or organizations in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Mercer counties leave for a stopover in Ohio, Robert Olszewski said he is ready to serve again.

“Living with and overcoming a disability taught me determination and the desire to lead by example,” said Olszewski, 47, a student technical specialist at BC3. “Also leading by example shows others with a disability that they can also be a vital part of their society and community.”

Olszewski earned an associate degree in computer-numerical control machining from BC3 in 1996.

“It was just amazing”

He has worked at his alma mater addressing students’ computer-related questions since 2013. That same year he organized the first Western Pennsylvania Disability Conference in Valencia and learned about Joni and Friends, a disability ministry based in California that created the videos showing the need for mobility aids.

Olszewski was diagnosed at 13 months with the disorder that “affects my muscles,” he said. His parents were told to not expect him to walk or to talk. He proved doctors wrong, but has benefited from mobility aids after any of his 10 surgeries.

He and other volunteers March 19 moved the 42 manual wheelchairs and 40 walkers, crutches and metal canes of silver, black and other colors onto a rented truck parked aside his storage facility in Butler.

The truck left for Wadsworth, Ohio, where the mobility aids were stored temporarily by Joni and Friends. The mobility aids will be transported to the Monroe Correctional Complex in Monroe, Wash. Inmates working in the state institution’s restoration center will review and refurbish the mobility aids to operate and appear as if new.

“It was just amazing how many lives can be touched by the equipment that was donated,” Olszewski said.

Inmates will then wrap in plastic the mobility aids Olszewski collected in preparation for shipping to countries that include Haiti, an island in the Caribbean; Ghana, in Africa; or Argentina, in South America. The mobility aids could arrive abroad by late September.

Effort “is going to change lives”



Robert Olszewski, 47, a student technical specialist at Butler County Community College, collected 82 canes, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs from individuals or organizations in four western Pennsylvania counties over the course of a year. The mobility aids will be refurbished by inmates in Washington state and ultimately benefit Third World residents longing for personal mobility. Olszewski, who is also a 1996 BC3 graduate, is shown Monday, April 5, 2021, on the college’s main campus in Butler Township.

Olszewski received his first donation in April 2020 from a church in Beaver County. Olszewski said Concordia Lutheran Ministries, in Cabot, Butler County, contributed a majority of the used mobility aids that “filled” his 100-square-foot storage facility.



Residents of Concordia’s independent living facilities were also among donors, said Frank Skrip, Concordia spokesperson, adding that the healthcare provider assists other domestic and foreign faith-based organizations.

A portion of the 82 canes, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs collected by Robert Olszewski, 47, a student technical specialist at Butler County Community College, is shown Friday, March 19, 2021. The mobility aids will be refurbished by inmates in Washington state and ultimately benefit Third World residents longing for personal mobility. Olszewski is also a 1996 BC3 graduate.

“For individuals both local and abroad who have mobility issues and do not have access to mobility aids,” Skrip said, “life can just be so much more difficult.”

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Everhard, senior pastor of Gospel Fellowship Presbyterian Church in America, Valencia, was among 10 volunteers who helped Olszewski load the mobility aids onto the 26-foot-rental truck bound for Ohio.

“Rob took it upon himself to spearhead this particular effort,” Everhard said. “We are proud of what BC3 is doing for our community, and Rob is one of the star employees, in my opinion, because of his love for the campus, and for the community that BC3 represents.

“If the word community is part of the mission of the school, then Rob is clearly embodying that desire to care for others. He has a beautiful heart for those who are disabled or handicapped.”

Olszewski acquired the storage facility in Butler and “reached out to the community to let them know about the need for wheelchairs,” said Jamia Cinelli, of Columbus, Ohio, director of the Ohio area region of Joni and Friends. The Ohio region encompasses western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and eastern Indiana.

“What Rob is doing,” Cinelli said, “is going to change lives.”

BC3 students, faculty or staff, or other individuals and organizations seeking to donate mobility aids toward Olszewski’s effort can email Olszewski at rob_olszewski@yahoo.com. Olszewski said he can arrange transportation for large collections.

Contributions will give “someone who doesn’t have mobility mobility,” Olszewski said. “To see these stories of people who are basically coming out of the dirt and into a wheelchair and being able to have mobility without depending on somebody else just floors me.

“And we can do that.”

Olszewski received a Distinguished Alumni Award from BC3 in 2012 and was the distinguished alumni speaker at BC3’s 2013 commencement.