Craig remembers Reno Vigil, graduate and longtime volunteer

Mention the name “Reno” to any Craig Hospital old timer, and you’ll be rewarded with a grin and a comment about burritos or the Broncos—or maybe both. The Craig graduate and long-time volunteer passed away in April 2013 of pneumonia, leaving behind a legacy of compassion and fun.

Reno Lee Vigil was born in Denver in 1963 and grew up in a large family alongside his mother’s young siblings.

“Oooh, Reno was ornery, but a good ornery, he was never disobedient,” says his mother, Sandra Archuleta. “One day when he was about four, I caught him about to operate on his aunt with a kitchen knife. He said he wanted to be like Dr. Ben Casey.”

As a youth, Vigil was a boxer and a football player, and worked many jobs, including a time at Denver’s famed Casa Bonita. In 1982, while traveling in Western Colorado, he fell asleep at the wheel, rolling his car multiple times. He was ejected and the car rolled on top of him. After two months in the hospital in Grand Junction, he came to Craig to learn how to live life with quadriplegia.

“Reno never wanted to come back and live at home after the accident, he wanted to live on his own and do it himself,” says Archuleta. “I didn’t treat him any differently because he was in a chair; he may have been paralyzed, but there was nothing wrong with his brain.”

Vigil began volunteering periodically at Craig following his accident, and became an official volunteer in 2001, serving in a peer support role. His mother would prepare pounds and pounds of beans and chile, which he and his aide would make into burritos for Craig patients and staff. “He was sneaky, the burritos were his way to start a conversation, they were an instrument for him,” says Archuleta.

According to Jill Stelley Virden, Craig’s volunteer coordinator, Vigil would spend hours chatting with patients and their families about anything and everything, including the latest Bronco game. “He loved Craig so much, he made people feel good about their decision to come there,” she says. “It was so comforting for patients to be able to hear from a previous patient who was an advocate and a supporter of Craig.”

“He used to wheel through the hallways so fast, I had to yell at him to slow down. He always had his shades on the top of his head and a giant smile,” says Sarah Davidson, driving rehabilitation and transportation specialist. “He was hilarious and fearless, kind and honest. He did the best he could with what he had.”

Following Vigil’s death, his family donated thousands of dollars worth of durable medical equipment to the hospital so that other patients might benefit from the independence Vigil knew.

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Craig garden provides unique therapy, respite space

On any given day, Craig Hospital patients, their families, and staff members can find enjoyment in the garden, a peaceful space located outside of Craig's East Building.

"People feel better connected to nature here," says Susie Hall, HTR/CRTS, Craig's registered horticultural therapist. "It's an escape; it's a place of sanctuary."

But the restful nature of the Gardens belies its therapeutic purpose. The garden, which is partially donor-funded and is managed by the Therapeutic Recreation department, plays an important role in the recovery of Craig patients.

Hall works one-on-one with patients, showing them how to use adaptive tools and garden equipment raised beds. She also offers classes and group activities in the garden or the Craig Greenhouse. The group activities offer a means for occupational and speech therapists to address patient goals while working on functional skills.

"The therapists can relate the activity to whatever skill their patient needs to work on," says Tom Carr, director of Therapeutic Recreation. "It's co-creating, and Susie's providing the expertise through the modality of therapeutic horticulture."

Craig's Horticultural Therapy program was launched in 1982 and has grown over the years and the garden has been relocated several times as the campus expanded. Several grants from the Colorado Garden Foundation as well as one from BallCo Credit Union in 2012 have funded several garden enhancement projects.

Ongoing operational support for the Gardens has come from donors, including Mike Hoops, co-owner of Organix Supply, and his wife Rhysa. Organix manufactures and distributes organic fertilizers and soil to a variety of industries, including consumer, landscape, and golf course products.

"Susie explained to us how well the patients responded to the therapy they received in the Garden. Being a gardener myself, I understand how one can get away from problems and limitations when working with living plants, seeing them respond and grow due to the care you have given them," says Mike Hoops.

Hall says that patients thrive through this therapy. "People need to be able to nurture and give," she says. "In a hospital environment, the attention is often on the patient and their medical needs and the opportunity to nurture does not exist —the Garden gives them that chance."

New book chronicles author's recovery at Craig Hospital

Mark and Robyn Glaser, members of Craig Hospital's 1907 Ambassador Circle, were involved in a serious motorcycle accident in 2010. Mark was left with brain and spinal injuries, and spent six weeks rehabilitating at Craig Hospital. He recently wrote a book, "58 Feet," about his accident, surgeries, rehabilitation and recovery. The project originally began as a journal for his at-the-time unborn child. He relied on feedback from many people, journal entries kept by Robyn, hospital and physician reports, and police and EMT reports to piece together his story. The couple hopes that the book will inspire others to tackle the challenges they face. "58 Feet" is now available on Amazon and proceeds will benefit the Craig Hospital Foundation.

Foundation News

Crowdfunding campaign raises $13,442 for PEAK Center Scholarships

On Sept. 1, the Craig Hospital Foundation launched the Hope for Rehabilitation 2.0 campaign, a one-month crowdfunding campaign that raised money for scholarships to Craig Hospital’s PEAK Center. Throughout the 30 days the Craig Hospital Foundation raised $13,442 on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to provide 72 six-month PEAK Center scholarships for clients who cannot afford to join. Thank you to everyone who gave, shared the campaign via email and social media, and supported this exciting new campaign! To watch a video about the PEAK Center, visit http://bit.ly/PEAKcrowdfunding.

Construction Update

Craig Hospital and GE Johnson Construction Company, the general contractor for the expansion and revitalization project, partnered to celebrate the completion of the structural steel for the project. On Oct. 10, 2013, both teams joined together for a Topping Out Party, traditionally held to celebrate the placement of the last beam on top of the building. Attendees wore top hats and lunch included several “topping” options to go along with the theme.

The first floor concrete slab has been placed, which will house the new PEAK, Admitting Department and the Reception Area. In addition, this is the new location for the Craig Hospital main entry doors and lobby. During the month of October, all of the concrete fliers and the roof will be placed. Prior to the end of the year, the structural steel will be sprayed with fire-proofing. This protects the steel from structural failure in the event of a fire. Into November, the exterior walls for the new addition will be framed. Then, exterior sheathing and brick will begin.

Craig Hospital Research Updates

The Craig Hospital Research Department currently staffs 19 with a $3.5 million annual budget in federal, state, corporate, and foundation grants devoted to conducting a wide variety of applied SCI and TBI rehabilitation research. In addition, funds raised from the annual PUSHER Dinner support basic and clinical research. Over the past several years, grants from the Craig Hospital Foundation have funded four TBI pilot research projects:

**Home-Based Virtual Reality (VR) Treatment for Chronic Balance Problems in Adults with TBI**

The development of an affordable, effective balance intervention that individuals with TBI are able to independently and safely perform over an extended period of time—even years after injury—has the potential to significantly improve balance and the ability to engage in other healthy physical activities while decreasing the risk of falls. A recent study conducted by Juvik, et al. 2013 found that TBI patient’s balance impairments improved similarly with both traditional physical and VR technology paradigms, while they were undergoing inpatient rehabilitation. This finding suggested that VR technology may provide a viable method for improving balance after TBI. A large scale randomized controlled trial to test this hypothesis has been submitted as part of Craig Hospital TBI Model Systems grant and was funded for five years. A manuscript of the pilot study has been accepted for publication.

**Improving Walking After TBI Through Structured Volunteer Activity**

Volunteering has been found to be positively related to psychological health, happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. Volunteering may enhance resilience to emotional distress, which could be therapeutic for improving emotional adjustment after TBI. A small sample of individuals with a history of TBI completed a three-month volunteer intervention after which they exhibited a reduction of overall emotional distress and an improvement in well-being. This foundation and sense of purpose. All five participants willingly continued to volunteer following completion of the study. This study was also submitted as part of Craig Hospital TBI Model Systems grant and was funded as a large scale randomized controlled trial.

**Supported Versus Dynamic Seating in Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury and Effects on Function: A Pilot Study**

This recently-completed study evaluated two groups of individuals with a history of TBI to determine the benefits of seated posture on mobility, safety, and balance. The findings of this study provide support for the future study that is currently underway at Craig Hospital.

**Errorless Learning for Training Use of Planner in Traumatic Brain Injury Patients who are in Post Traumatic Amnesia:**

This study focused on training individuals with TBI who were confused and amnesic to refer to a planner book for orientation. The study had two phases. In the first phase, participants received training to use the planner appropriately. In the second phase, participants were randomly assigned either to a treatment group or a control group that did not receive additional training. Participants in the treatment group were instructed on how to use the planner to help them remember what they need to do and when to do it. In the control group, participants were instructed on how to use the planner to help them understand the planner and its contents. The results of this study suggest that errorless learning may be an effective method for training individuals with TBI who are in post-traumatic amnesia to use a planner to help them remember what they need to do and when to do it.