


Venture

November/December 2009

Your guide to accessible travel 

RESOURCE GUIDE 2009 - 2010

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Loren Lyon

CEO

Magic Wheels, Inc.

Q Tell us about the company's origins.

A It's a pretty interesting story. Magic Wheels was co-founded by Steve Meginniss in 1996. He's a brilliant mechanical engineer and successful inventor who was involved in developing the Sonicare® toothbrush, which was an idea that originated through the tech transfer program at the University of Washington here in Seattle. Steve did a tremendous job in helping design that product and get initial production started. Several years afterwards he went back to the university looking for another great idea, which turned out to be a two-gear wheel for wheelchairs. The university had come up with early concepts, but they needed someone like Steve to actually develop the product and commercialize it. Steve immediately saw what a huge need there was for a product like this and began seeking funding to support the research and development work. He and his partners were able to obtain three grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which funded a 10-year process of prototyping, designing, and testing about four different iterations of the gearing system. Later funding, provided by private-equity investors, enabled getting production started and taking the product to market. A great deal of the product strength and reliability testing was conducted at the University of Washington's material science department. Plus, real-world exercises were conducted by "test pilots," as we called them, both here in Seattle and at other cities around the country in order to test the product's effectiveness and durability in a wide range of terrains, environments, and temperatures. The first-generation prototype was developed in 1999, and once certain improvements had been made the second generation arrived the next year. Two more generations were produced, tested, and studied be-

fore the current design was introduced into the market in 2006. So you can see that a great deal of thought, planning, and testing went into this product long before we determined it was the right time to make it available to our customers. Steve oversaw this process, of course, and he is still the chief technical officer of the company.

Q How has it been received?

A If you visit our Web site and click on "case studies" you'll find a number of testimonials from current users, one from a gentleman with a doctorate in psychotherapy who attests to the positive psychological benefits. It's been very gratifying to hear from people saying this product has really improved their lives, and in quite a number of ways. In addition to the gearing, which allows the wheelchair user to overcome daily obstacles with less effort, it really helps in terms of climbing hills. One of the most important features is the automatic hill-hold function, which functions in low gear only. When a person is climbing their way up an incline, gravity wants them to roll backward. The hill-hold will hold their position between pushes automatically, but it will also allow the user to easily override the mechanism and roll the wheels backward in case they need to do so. It's easy to understand how the freedom and confidence this provides bolsters a person's sense of dignity and personal well-being, but there are physical benefits, as well, especially in terms of the chronic shoulder pain so many manual wheelchair users experience. A government-funded clinical study by the University of Maryland indicates that using Magic Wheels reduces shoulder pain by over 55 percent, with a statistical error of less than 5 percent. And the better you feel physically, the more you're going to get out and enjoy



the world, and the more exercise you're going to get. Plus Magic Wheels are great for people who enjoy traveling, because you never know what kind of terrain you're going to encounter.

Q How should someone proceed who's interested in learning more?

A Our Web site has a great deal of information, and we have staff available to answer any questions someone may have about the product itself or to discuss issues related to insurance reimbursement. Then, if they'd like to proceed, we'll direct them to their local dealer—who they may already know since so many people already have a relationship with the wheelchair providers in their area. The dealer will then schedule a trial ride, which is a breeze since Magic Wheels slip right on some manual wheelchair models and fit the rest with an adaptor. With a little instruction they'll be ready to start climbing hills, curbs, and ramps, experiencing the freedom and confidence our current customers enjoy. ☺

TO LEARN MORE: (866) MAGICWH (624-4294), info@magicwheels.com, www.magicwheels.com.
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