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Virginia Guffey, center, is on her feet again. At far left, Virginia practices walking under Ron Pawlowski's guidance. In the photo above, Ron wheels Virginia to her fitting.

Going Strong

Amputation Doesn't Keep 84-Year-Old from Returning to Work in Mill

Octogenarian Virginia Guffey is a remarkable woman. She has the spirit and enthusiasm of someone decades younger, and she herself said she feels more like 50 than 84. She is remarkably strong and continues a full-time job at U.S. Steel Corp. where she's been employed since 1949. And she is remarkably lucky, narrowly missing being killed by a forklift. Although the horrific accident resulted in a surgical amputation below the knee, Virginia made a remarkable recovery and is back to work.

"I have no plans to retire," she said. "I feel good and I want to get on with my life."

Virginia wants to resume her former position as an inventory clerk, but until she regains more mobility, she has been reassigned to the Midwest plant in Portage

where she is performing clerical duties in the office.

Although she is driving again on a limited basis, U.S. Steel sends a van to take her to work. "I still use the wheelchair to get to the building, but once inside I use the walker. Wheelchairs, they're not fun," she said.

Virginia is appreciative of U.S. Steel's efforts to assist her. The company built ramps to her home, installed a chairlift to her basement, and rebuilt the shower to accommodate seating. "U.S. Steel has treated me very well. They've been very good to me," she said.

Learning to walk again

Although her residual limb is still going through a healing process from the March

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2008 amputation, she is looking forward to regaining full mobility. She diligently reports for physical therapy at Methodist Hospitals Southlake Campus Rehab Center, where she works on strength and balance. When asked what exercises she undertakes at rehab, Virginia laughs. "You name it and I'll do it," she said. "They are mostly teaching me to walk with a cane now. The (prosthetist) will let me know when I can have my (permanent) artificial leg."

Ron Pawlowski, CPO, began seeing Virginia when she

"Virginia really is an amazing woman and can serve as an inspiration to others."

was referred to Calumet Orthopedic & Prosthetics Co. by U.S. Steel's medical clinic in Merrillville, where Virginia is an outpatient.

"Virginia really is an amazing woman and can serve as an inspiration to others," said Ron. "She's a spirited person and very motivated."

Ron has fitted Virginia with a non-definitive prosthesis while the residual limb continues to change in size and shape. "She's doing real well and may get a permanent prosthesis before the end of the year. We're in no hurry; we want to wait until the soft tissue atrophy is complete," he said.

In the meantime, Ron sees Virginia every four to six weeks. "We judge her progress. As her weight bearing changes through therapy, we'll change alignment. And as soft tissue atrophies, we'll add liners for suspension and a comfortable fit. When it's time for her permanent prosthesis, we'll determine the most appropriate components for her situation. She is getting very independent with walking. Right now, I'm thinking the Flex-Foot may be a good choice because it will let her walk farther and longer without getting tired."

Virginia's accident happened as she checked inventory at the Gary Works. With only one hour left on her shift, she noticed the forklift coming at her, but the driver didn't see her. "I was in a safe spot, but I couldn't get out of his way. It happened so fast. I always had a safe record at U.S. Steel. I had to wait until I was 83 to get injured," she said. "It's been proven to me that God is there – eight or nine more inches and the forklift would have run right over me."

U.S. Steel's medical team was summoned instantly and tried to make Virginia comfortable until the ambulance arrived. "I was awake the whole time," she said. Virginia was airlifted to Loyola University Medical Center, in Maywood, Ill. She remained hospitalized for almost a month, and then returned to work less than a month after her release, a feat of strength and resolve for any amputee – and especially so for an 84-year-old.

Always looking for the positive

Virginia truly is a woman who won't let adversity color her view of life. Even as she was transported to Loyola, she told the medical crew her first helicopter ride was beautiful. "That's the type of person I am," she said matter of factly. "I



Ron Pawlowski, CPO, checks Virginia Guffey's temporary prosthesis for proper fit.

have a positive outlook on life. I'm not one to sit back and feel sorry for myself."

In typical Virginia fashion, even visual impairment didn't slow her down. In 1956, she had an ocular muscular hemorrhage and lost eyesight in her left eye. "My doctor says my one eye is as good as some people's two," she said.

Virginia's strength was evident even as a very young woman. She began factory work in her hometown of Seymour, Ind., at age 20 to help support her parents and six siblings. "I had to have a job to help the family," she said simply. "I've had an awful lot of hard jobs."

The job at National Veneer & Lumber Co. paid 37 cents an hour. An uncle, who worked at U.S. Steel, recommended she could get better wages there at \$1.36 per hour, and she began a job in the sorting room in 1949.

"We wore green uniforms with collars and cuffs and sorted tin. There were more than 300 women and about 150 men. I was with them more than my family," she recalled. "I worked in all parts of the mill and was an inspector for 18 years. I've been in the warehouse since 1968. I love it!"

She also maintains an active lifestyle at her home in Merrillville. She enjoys gardening, although she had to let that slide this year, but she intends to make up for lost time next spring. In addition to her job, she manages her grocery shopping, errands, and attending church. She watches television, works puzzles, and reads magazines that tell true stories with upbeat and positive endings. She also enjoys the antics of her 10-year-old poodle, Happy. "He barks at everything," she said. She also is well traveled, having visited nine European countries, Hawaii three times and various destinations across the U.S.A.

A legend

Virginia was honored in August 2007 during American Steelworkers National Recognition Day at the U.S. Steel Yard in Gary. She was quoted in the Northwest Indiana Times: "I never dreamed I'd be recognized that much. It's because I've been in one plant that long. They say I'm a legend."

Perhaps now more than ever.

Patty Metcalf, certified mastectomy fitter, is ready to answer questions at the Breast Cancer Awareness Tea.



Jasper, and Newton counties. In addition to raising awareness of the disease, the Pink Ribbon Society organizes fundraising events with all proceeds going towards local breast cancer support and education. Since 2003, it has donated more than \$70,000 to various organizations and individuals supporting men and women from the community who have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States, other than skin cancer. More than 180,000 women will be found to have invasive breast cancer in 2008; more than 40,000 cases will be terminal. The good news is that there are more than 2.5 million survivors, due in large part to early detection of the disease through self-examination and yearly mammograms.

To help prevent cancer, women should:

- Conduct monthly self-breast examinations
- Get mammograms regularly, preferably once a year, starting at age 40
- Ask a doctor whether more frequent screenings are necessary based on family history

For more information, visit www.cancer.org or www.NBCAM.org.

For details on postmastectomy products, or to schedule an appointment at A Fitting Image, contact Patty Metcalf at (219) 942-2148 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Breast Cancer Awareness Tea a Success

Micki Pawlowski was among the crowd of 650 cancer survivors and supporters at the seventh annual Breast Cancer Awareness Tea at Avalon Manor, hosted by the Pink Ribbon Society, Sunday, Sept. 28.

Micki and Patty Metcalf, certified mastectomy fitter, presented a display of products offered by A Fitting Image, Calumet's postmastectomy care division devoted exclusively to women who've had full or partial breast removal or reconstructive surgery. A Fitting Image offers private fitting rooms and professional assistance in selecting, wearing, and caring for custom-fit breast forms and accompanying foundation garments.

The Tea is always held just prior to October – National Breast Cancer Awareness Month – and celebrates success and survival from breast cancer for residents in Lake, Porter,

Many Undergarment and Lingerie Fashions at A Fitting Image

Helping women look and feel their best postmastectomy is an important element of the recovery process. "As women, we know a positive self-image contributes to how we feel. That's why we offer a range of functional and pretty postmastectomy wear in a variety of products, styles, sizes, and colors," said Micki Pawlowski, the founder and president of A Fitting Image, the postmastectomy care division of Calumet.

"Many of the women really like the cami and tank top styles, part of the leisure and sleepwear collection by Luisa™Luisa, including spaghetti strap tanks, slip camis, princess cut camis, and pocketed tank tops," Micki said.

A popular item is the LuisaLuisa classic pajama (PJ500). The button front has a front closure hook & eye pocketed sleep bra, which is attached to the



shoulder seams of the pajama jacket and has no constraining under-bust elastic. The sleep bra's prosthesis pocket keeps any breast form securely in place. Made of 100 percent cotton, the pajama is available in sizes through 4X. New colors and prints are available monthly.

A Fitting Image also offers a full line of postmastectomy foundations, bras in a variety of colors, styles, and sizes, and post-surgical wear. Certified postmastectomy fitter Patty Metcalf meets with clients one-on-one to assist them in selecting the best products that meet each individual's physical, cosmetic, and lifestyle needs.

For details on any postmastectomy product, or to schedule an appointment, contact Patty Metcalf at (219) 942-2148 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Calumet Orthopedic & Prosthetics Co.

7554 Grand Blvd., SR 51

Hobart, IN 46342



Calumet Practitioners Attend AOPA National Assembly

Ron Pawlowski, CPO, and Geoff Pawlowski, Calumet business manager, attended the 2008 American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA) National Assembly held Sept. 10-13 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

Ron and Geoff participated in business and clinical education programs, as well as visited exhibitors showcasing the latest technology for the prosthetics and orthotics profession.

Keeping current on new procedures and products, and maintaining standards of the profession, are all part of continuing education programs participated in by the practitioners at Calumet.

Of specific interest to Ron and Geoff at the AOPA Assembly were the BioSculptor™ CAD/CAM Total Clinical Solutions, Endolite's KX06 knee and Esprit foot, and Dr. Comfort Shoes.

Dr. Comfort Shoes is a new product line Calumet will be carrying. Dr. Comfort Shoes for the diabetic foot offer leather shoes for men and women in both lace and Velcro styles.

According to the manufacturer, Dr. Comfort Shoes are specially designed to fit the diabetic foot. They feature extra width and depth in the toe box and forefoot to relieve pressure from key areas of the foot.

Dr. Comfort currently offers 17 different men's styles and 19 different women's styles in a variety of colors and

an extensive size range. Full grain leather uppers are on most styles and full leather linings are in all shoes, with the exception of the athletic line, which utilizes a cotton lining. Inserts for diabetic patients include a standard heat-moldable or custom-made insert based on medical necessity, both of which qualify for reimbursement under Medicare.

Diabetic shoes are made to provide protection, enhance comfort, and reduce injury. Studies show that well-fitted diabetic shoes with moldable insoles reduce the development of ulcers and sores that lead to serious foot problems. Studies have indicated that patients who wear therapeutic shoes had an ulcer recurrence rate of only 17 percent while those who returned to wearing regular shoes had an 83 percent recurrence rate.

Because shoes play such a vital role in the management of these patients, Congress passed the Therapeutic Shoe Bill in 1993, which made it possible to provide depth shoes and custom inserts through Medicare coverage.

Diabetic shoes should not be purchased off-the-shelf. It's very important to be fitted by a trained professional because a diabetic may not be able to feel an improper fit due to peripheral neuropathy. And, also important to the patient's insurance coverage, the Medicare Shoe Bill requires the footwear to be fitted and furnished by a qualified professional (orthotist, prosthetist, pedorthist, or podiatrist).

Ron Pawlowski is skilled in creating custom foot orthoses and fitting orthopedic shoes that protect injured, sensitive, or at-risk feet. Based on the physician's prescription, Ron can evaluate the condition and design a custom foot orthosis or shoe insert, or custom-fit shoes to the patient's needs.