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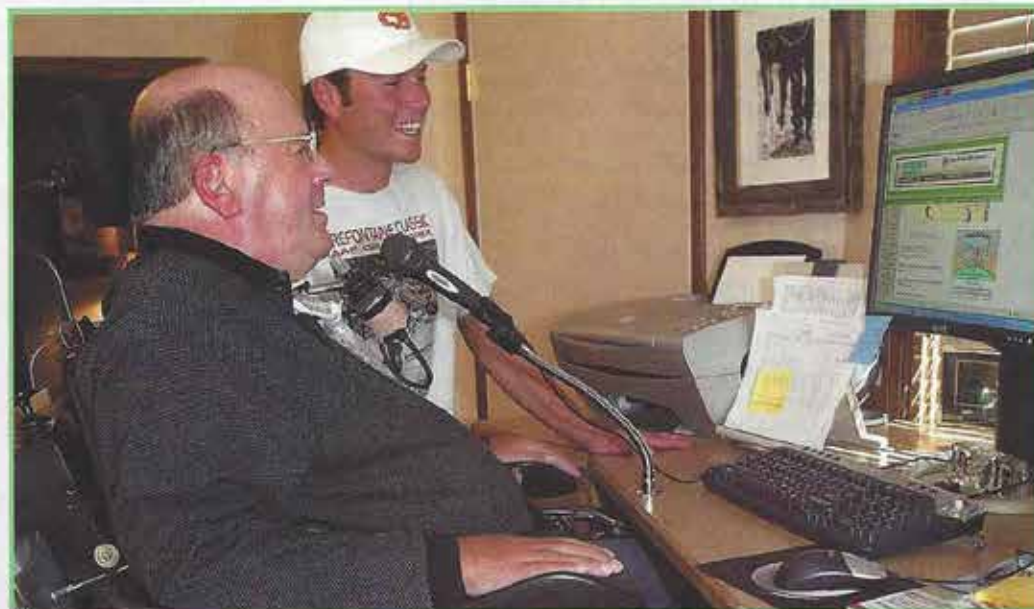
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Meets



Using state-of-the-art voice recognition software, Dave Matheny runs the business end of his Oregon wheat ranch while son Shane takes care of physical operations outdoors.

When pressed against the toggle switch, Dave Matheny maneuvers his power chair around the dining room table to a sliding glass door, where he can overlook the newly tilled ground. Matheny likes to trek down to the mailbox or out to the shop, where he can gaze across the land his immigrant grandfather, Fred Rausch, once worked. "Being home means everything to me. I can look out and see what's going on in the fields," says Matheny, who spent nearly a year in recovery and rehab thinking of little else besides the day he would return home. But getting there required a massive community effort. He's profoundly grateful to neighbors, family and friends who've given generously of their time and talents, not to mention tens of thousands of dollars that helped him purchase the latest in high-tech adaptive equipment. Now his life is as fulfilling as it was before the accident, and his farming heritage is once again secure.

The Mathenys have been farming in Sand Hollow for three generations, since 1939. The 1,700-acre all-wheat ranch is located midway between Heppner and Hermiston in eastern Oregon. In the middle of nowhere, really. Cell phones don't work too well out here, but a person can hear the wind rustling through the locust trees nearly every day.

Matheny's role in the ranching operation has changed

since his accident, but he's found ways to make significant contributions. Son Shane, 22—the fourth generation along with Stefan, 18—continues to seek out his father throughout the day for help with the sundry details of ranching. "Like how much fertilizer to use," says Shane, who dropped out of Oregon State University to help out after the accident.

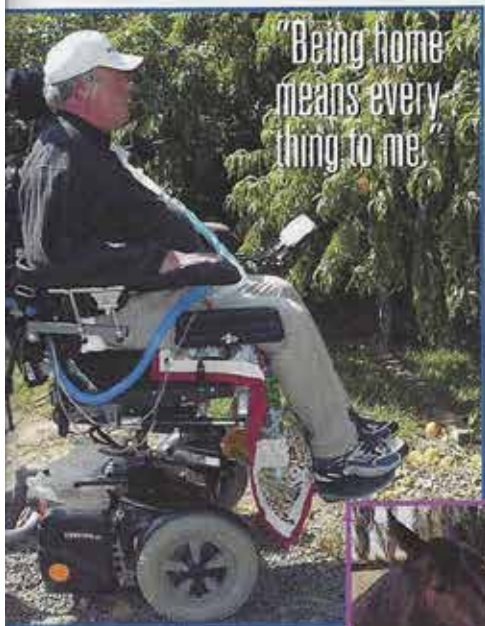
Dave Matheny monitors the wheat market, stock prices and weather conditions by using a satellite computer system. The \$5,000 set-up includes a Dell XPS with flat-screen monitor and Dell printer. But it's voice recognition software that allows him to log on without a keyboard, surf the Internet or talk on the phone without having to use a headset.

"I talk through a microphone that reaches a couple feet from the desk where the computer sits," he says. "I have everyone's phone number in the computer and I can call them up as I need." At first he used an IBM program called ViaVoice, but kept encountering voice activation bugaboos. Since switching to Dragon NaturallySpeaking, version 7.0, he says the system is working "tons better."

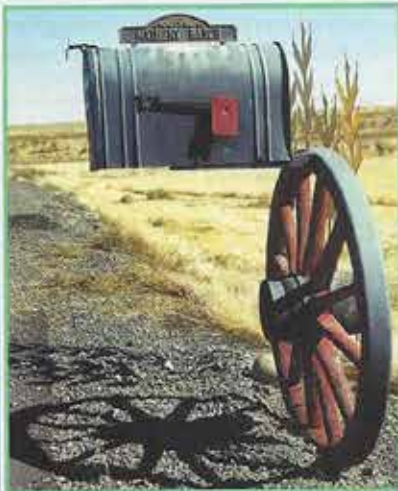
Those who know him best aren't surprised that Matheny has found ways to continue being an integral part of the family business. He's a tough cuss. Just like his father, local folks say: Orval Matheny always wore a pair of suede gloves to protect his hands, or what was left of them. He burned his fingers clean off in an electrical accident and

Heritage

BY KAREN SPEARS ZACHARIAS



"Being home means every thing to me."



Photos by Don Cresswell

spent a year in a Portland hospital and five more recovering. Pauline Matheny said the disability slowed her husband down a bit, "but he faced his difficulty and learned to do his farm work." He learned to make do. Those who know him best knew that Dave would, too.

Sept. 9, 2001, started

out as one of those pine-scented fall days that men like Dave Matheny long for—a day to scout for elk in the foothills of the Blue Mountains in southern Morrow County. Farm chores would just have to wait. He packed up his gear and his colt and rode off into the hills with sister Sally Brosnan and her husband Mark.

Matheny didn't have even a chill of premonition. Nothing, not even a flinch in the colt's flank. As they climbed a mountain



ridge, something spooked the colt, and Matheny went flying, landing hard, snapping his neck at the C3-4 level. For the next three hours, as an emergency crew struggled to reach him, Sally kept her brother alive with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Matheny's fight to return home to the family ranch had just begun. Finally, in August 2002, after what seemed like a lifetime in a Portland hospital, rehab center and skilled nursing facilities, he came home.

Volunteers from Hermiston and Heppner

had designed and built an addition onto the house before Matheny returned home. The spacious room houses not only him, but all his newfangled equipment. Like his custom-equipped Permobil Chairman 2K power-chair. "It's easy to maneuver, very stable, and even has cruise-control," says Matheny, motoring his chair past a cupboard adorned with leaded-glass doors, around a corner and into a room that was once his office. "They've done a good job on the remodel," he says.

Shane enters the room and Dave juts his chin up against the toggle and elevates his chair until he's eye-level with his son. The \$30,000 wheelchair weighs about 395-pounds. Inside the house Dave cruises over throw rugs and wooden floors. Outside, he cranks up the speed and challenges those poking alongside in a race to the shop. Dave wins the uphill challenge. The Permobil can reach speeds of 6 mph.

Everything in the home addition is state-of-the-art. A flat screen television sits in an alcove above a remote-controlled propane fireplace. In one corner of the room, a newly constructed desk serves as Matheny's workplace. His voice-activated laptop provides him with instant access to the latest news in the global economy.

Quicken's financial software will make it possible for Matheny to take over the ranch's bookkeeping responsibilities from wife Patty. He anticipates he'll be completely squared away on the computer system by the time the next tax season rolls around. Patty's kept busy with her sales job at a furniture store in Hermiston. It's a job she needs in order to maintain the family's health insurance.

Matheny's Dell computer system also helps him keep apprised of advances in spinal cord research and disability issues. "I've got just about everything from a technological advantage that a person in my condition could utilize," he says.

On the Move

One of the most important high-tech devices Matheny relies on is the Handi-Move

ceiling track that runs from the corner above the recliner, across the bed, around the room, through an extra-wide door that leads to an extra-large bathroom. Matheny gets ready for his day riding the conveyor lift through the process of showering, shaving, brushing, flossing, dressing. All of which is done for him by one of four personal care assistants who assist him around the clock.

The track cost about \$5,000 to install but was worth the investment, says Talia Armstrong, Matheny's niece and one of his

PCAs. There's no way the lanky brunette could lift her six-foot Uncle Dave without such a nifty contraption. The device requires that the ceiling be reinforced, but thanks to the track, on a good day, Armstrong can get her uncle from bed to shower in less than five minutes.

Fearing that Uncle Dave was getting all the cheap thrills and she wasn't, Armstrong once harnessed herself up to the mesh sling and took a spin around the room, envisioning herself as Judy Jetson buzzing through her morn-



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ing via a track system. "It's really fun," she says. "I almost wish I could use it on a regular basis." She can't imagine getting by without the remote-controlled lift. "When Uncle Dave's in the hospital it takes four people to move him. With this device, I can move him by myself. It's completely safe."

The sling is swift, but Matheny is even more enthralled with his StimMaster Galaxy bike. Billed as the "rehab bike of the future," the \$14,000 bike builds muscle tone through functional electrical stimulation. Just 15 minutes of pedaling three times a week has made a significant difference in Matheny's atrophied legs. "It's amazing the amount of muscle that's come back as a result of biking," he says.

Armstrong moves her uncle into the cushioned seat of the bike via the remote-controlled sling. Then she wraps his feet into well-padded stirrups and hooks up electrodes to his thighs, back and buttocks. A pedaling velocity of 36 revolutions per minute has to be maintained, so sometimes Armstrong or one of the other PCAs provides manual assistance with the pedals. The electrical impulses feel akin to that kinky sensation you get when you smack your funny bone, Matheny says. Or like when you stick your finger in a socket. He enjoys the tingling.

"It feels great. I'll break out into a little bit of a sweat. I really enjoy it. And I feel good after I get off it. I can't say enough good things about the bike," he says. He complements those lower-body workouts with an upper-body stimulator, also made by StimMaster. "You attach these patches that send electrical

Unsung Tech: The Magitek Story

With all the public relations attention given Independence Technology's (Johnson & Johnson's) stair-climbing, gyro-controlled iBOT and other expensive standing or elevating wheelchairs such as Dave Matheny's Permobil, it's easy for a small company's electronic control unit to be overlooked. Magitek, for instance, sold its first actuator control for powerchairs in January 2000, and although it won Best New Product at Medtrade that same year, many consumers may not realize just how important the company's Lautzenhiser drive controls are to power chair users, especially those with very limited movement capabilities.

What distinguishes Magitek's product from other drive controls is what vice president Stephan Lautzenhiser calls its "human interface capability." Essentially, any part of the body—not just the head, as is common with other controls—can be used to actuate the various functions of any power chair. Besides driving, seat functions like tilt and recline, power legs and standing mode can be operated by very slight body movements. The actuator mechanism, according to Lautzenhiser, "has the ability to roam around the body." He calls it a "joystick in space"—an apt description: Magitek's sister company—Enhiser, also run by the Lautzenhiser family—is involved in designing missile guidance systems and telemetry for the United States military, and Enhiser's resources, talent, and ideas have been shared with NASA as well as Magitek.

Magitek's high-tech roots reside in—surprise!—Indiana farmland. The company's headquarters are still located on the family farm once owned by Stephen and Douglas Lautzenhiser's grandfather. "When people drive by this small building out in the country, they have no idea the level of technology that's going on in here." The family business began by manufacturing agricultural products but took advantage of greener pastures in the biomedical field. "It's been a long, hard road," says Lautzenhiser. "There are no fat cats around here. We spend a lot on research and development. Nobody's getting rich." But they are producing products that benefit those with very limited mobility and reaping the satisfaction that comes with doing something truly worthwhile. Next up? The Magi-mouse, a computer cursor control unit for those with limited movement. For more info, log on to www.magitek.com.

impulses to your upper body," he explains.

Besides the benefit of buffed-up pecs, according to Matheny the extra stimulation has improved his respiratory system. "I'm feeling really good. And I need the Coughalator less and less, so the infections are decreasing."

Still, all these inventions may be no more important to him than a good strip of blacktop. "Pavement is a tool I use a lot," he says. And with the dirt and gravel roads common to wheat ranches in Oregon's Morrow County, a paved road is a luxury. "I took the chair over a gravel road once, but it was a pretty rough ride." Dave's sister-in-law, Sheila Cozad, found the money to help pave the path to the shop.

The \$11,000 road not only goes by home and shop but also down the slope to the mailbox. The paving project was carried out with help from GOALS. (Go Out And Live Successfully), a nonprofit foundation dedicated to assisting people with spinal cord injuries (www.goalsinc.net).

Cozad also helped obtain funding for the \$14,000 exercise bike and the \$50,000 Ford van sitting in the family's drive. The perfor-

mance mobile is equipped with a lift, a raised roof, and customized windows. The van is a necessity. How else would he get to the doctor's office or, more importantly, take those excursions into those mountains he loves so well?

Small communities too often lack the resources to support specialized care, especially what's needed by vent patients: pulmonary and respiratory specialists, PCAs around the clock, a medical supply store nearby for various tubes, filters, motors and pumps. And backup generators and backups for the backups.

But Matheny is fortunate. "I feel so lucky to have had all this support here at home. They raised thousands to get me all this stuff. So that I could come home," he says. An auction at the Hermiston Convention Center in the spring of 2002 raised over \$100,000. "That auction is really what got everything going for me. Getting that kind of support is one of the advantages of being in a small community."

While experienced PCAs aren't that easy to

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find in a rural town, those who live in the area usually don't move around a lot, switching jobs, so there's a lot of consistency to his care. When Matheny was living out his days at a rehab and later in institutions in Portland, far from home, he was constantly depressed, despondent about the quality of life he was facing as a respirator-dependent quadriplegic. Now he no longer has bouts of depression. "I can't do everything I did before. But you adjust. You do what you can. Life is good," he says. "I don't want for anything."

Well, maybe one thing.

It's an idea that came to him on one of those sleepless nights when irritating neck spasms triggered by his vent make sleep nearly impossible. "I'd like to get Bill Gates to donate the money to outfit a motor home with all these gadgets. You know, a ceiling track for a sling, a lift for my wheelchair, a converter for my Coughalator. It'd be nice to go

around the nation and show people examples of what works for people with disabilities like me."

Although he doesn't consider himself a political person by nature, Matheny knows that improving the quality of life for people with disabilities requires adequate funding. Every one of his home's gizmos came with a hefty price tag. He would like to help find the funds to improve the lifestyle of every wheelchair user.

"I've got about everything anybody in my condition could want. I know that others in my situation could have this setup too, if they only had the money," says Matheny. "I hope I can be a help and encouragement to someone else." ❧

Karen Spears Zacharias is an award-winning journalist and author of the forthcoming book, Hero Mama (April 2005, William Morrow Co., HarperCollins Publishers). She can be reached at 541/379-8572 or zach@uci.net.

Attorney Ronald R. Gilbert

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Attorney for the Spinal Cord Injured

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