

# SmartStep restores mobility, hope for stroke victim

By Toni Walthall

In January 2008, 30-year-old Eric Messer returned home from work, experiencing numbness in his mouth.

"I knew I didn't feel well, but it went away after about 20 minutes. I didn't think much about it; and I went to bed," he said.

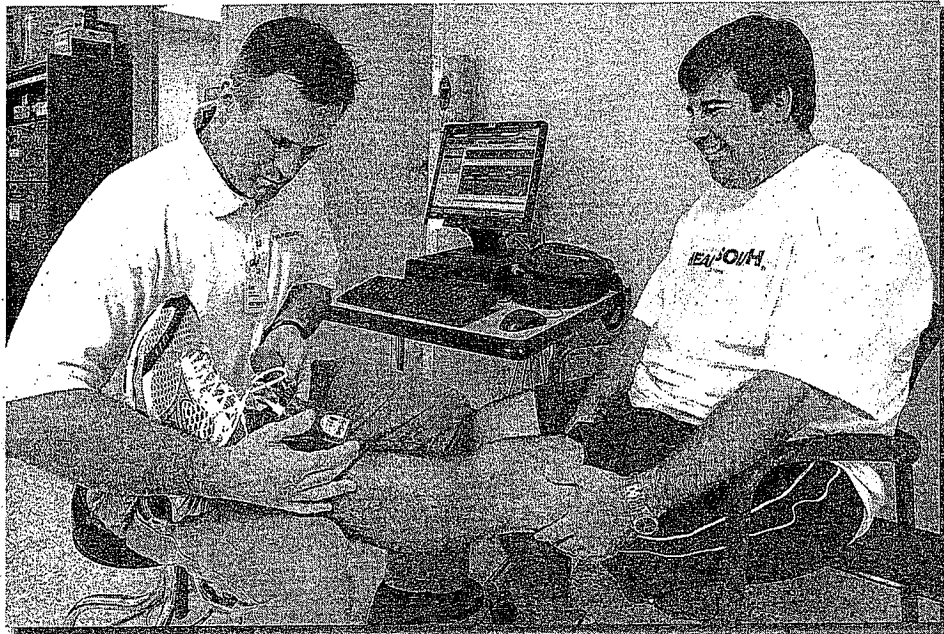
He awoke the next morning to the same numb sensation, but this time it was in his left foot, which dragged the floor as he tried to carry his crying four-month-old daughter.

After falling through the shower door while getting ready for work, he was rushed to the hospital, where he remained for 10 days as he was treated as a stroke victim. Released from the hospital, Messer was told he probably wouldn't walk again. Without any degree of mobility on the left side of his body, Messer needed help to get back on his feet.

An athlete in college, the young father was humbled and frustrated by the limitations that had unexpectedly afflicted his body.

"We take it for granted every day, but at 30 years old, I didn't know how to walk. I was like an 11-month-old baby learning how to walk again," he said. "It was a terrible, terrible, frustrating time for me."

Physical Therapists at HealthSouth Lakeshore Rehabilitation Hospital tried everything to assess and help him as he worked relentlessly to overcome the aftermath of stroke, which impacted the part of his



Above > Stroke patient Eric Messer (right) is fitted with SmartStep technology (shown below) by HealthSouth Physical Therapist Ken Gables. Messer, 30, credits HealthSouth Lakeshore Rehabilitation Hospital and SmartStep for helping him walk again.



brain that controls motor-sensory skills.

"I tried so hard, but I just couldn't get it. I began to cry. It was so frustrating," Messer said. "Here I had walked for 30 years and yet couldn't figure out why I couldn't do it."

Motivated by his love for his infant daughter, Messer was determined to not let the stroke take anything more away from him.

"I wanted to be able to walk her down the aisle when she got married. I wanted to play with her, carry her," he said. "I wasn't going to let her walk before me."

His progress took a dramatic turn when his physical therapy team, lead by HealthSouth's Ken Gables, introduced SmartStep technology into his rehabilitation program.

The SmartStep rehabilitation system consists of an insole inserted into the patient's shoe with wireless technology that transmits data to a computer that also maintains patient's medical records. As the foot lands, the insole measures changes in air pressure in air bladders to pinpoint where the problems are.

"I was most amazed at how much we can learn in a short assessment," said Gables. "It shows us in graphs that are similar to an EKG how (patients) shift weight. It helps us know how to fine tune and refine how they exercise and walk."

"The minute I got on it, I understood how to walk again. I could see it," said Messer. "It's a phenomenal tool."

According to Gables, the technology makes the rehabilitation process quicker.

"There is usually substantial improvements in one assessment," he said. "Eric is a very enthusiastic man, and he has recovered from an untimely event that doesn't happen to a lot of people at that age. SmartStep gave us the ability to be more precise in our understanding of how to help him."

SmartStep can help patients dealing with numerous conditions, including amputation, brain injury, hip fracture, joint replacement, lower limb trauma, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, stroke, neurological conditions and orthopedic or sports injuries.

To Messer, SmartStep created amazing results.

"The reality is I didn't do this by myself. God was by my side from day one and there is no doubt that he put people in my life to help me," he said. "The whole Lakeshore group and SmartStep made a terrible situation go so much smoother than it should have. We have world-class physical therapy right here in our backyard and a lot of people don't even know it. It's been a real blessing for me."