

A B C D E F G H Children's Health

“Wheelchair Gang” Keeps Kids Rolling

(NAPSA)—The basement of the Erie Shriners Hospital is a busy, noisy place. It's where the Wheelchair Repair Unit works its magic.

As the crew of volunteers huddles around wheelchairs and various wheelchair parts, a spirited conversation can usually be heard above the noise of power drills, hammers and other tools.

Fixing and refurbishing wheelchairs for the hospital's patients is a labor of love, said Chuck Connell, coordinator of the repair unit, or as they call themselves, the “Wheelchair Gang.”

“The children who use these chairs are typical kids, in that they can really be hard on them,” Connell noted. “However, we know that the more work they create for us, the stronger and more active they are becoming.”

The Wheelchair Repair Unit was launched in 1988. The concept grew out of discussions between William Ducz, maintenance supervisor at the Erie Hospital at that time, and his friend Robert Detzel, Past Potentate of the Zem Zem Shriners of Erie, Pa., and a member of the hospital's Board of Governors.

Funding came from the Zem Zem Shriners. As the program grew, the hospital budgeted money for the program, including tools and equipment. It also donated a computer that is used to keep specific data about each wheelchair, maintain detailed repair records and generate inspection checklists.

“The Wheelchair Repair Unit is very proud of its efforts,” noted Connell. “We conduct annual safety inspections of the chairs, repair seats, backs, footrests and other parts, adjust brakes, clean and lubricate wheels and bear-



Shiner Pete Schaaf is part of the Wheelchair Repair Unit at the Erie Shriners Hospital.

ings, and do whatever else it takes to make sure the chairs are safe for our kids.”

Currently about six retired men, all Zem Zem Shriners, work in the Wheelchair Repair Unit. And as more Shriners retire, more prospective workers become available. “We have a great time and we know we are doing something important for a group of very special kids,” said Connell.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607 or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child that Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.