



Prior to receiving his PET cart, Anthony Wanyoike's disability left him crawling on his hands and knees, unable to perform basic tasks. Photos of Anthony courtesy of Partners for Care, a compassion driven, non-profit organization that plays a critical role in the distribution of Mobility Carts in Kenya and East Africa as part of their goal of eliminating needless suffering and death by preventable diseases.

Mercy in Motion

Giving the Gift of Mobility

By Nick Van Der Linden
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Mobility. Most of us never give it a second thought.

But for 37-year old Anthony Wanyoike of Kenya, his inability to move is his harsh reality, and one that has left him crawling on his hands and knees for years. Anthony, the oldest of a family of five children, was born disabled after his mother labored for four days with no help. His disability has left him crawling in the dirt, unable to perform many daily tasks.

Anthony is not alone. He is one of more than 20 million people in the world's devel-

oping countries who are unable to walk due to landmine explosions, illness, birth defects or accidents.

Beginning of Something Special

Just two countries away, Larry Hills was working on a solution. While on a missionary trip in Zaire (now Congo), Africa in 1994, Hills told friend Mel West of the need for sturdy durable wheelchairs for people who were immobile for exactly these reasons. West reached out to his friend, inventor Ear-

ly Miner, who immediately went to work on developing the first Personal Energy Transportation (PET) Cart.

Once PET Cart prototypes passed field testing, shipments of carts began arriving in Zaire, where Hills set up a location to receive the cart frames, assemble them, and distribute them. In 1997, the group operated out of West's garage and a room at the Community United Methodist Church in Columbia, Missouri. As news of the project spread, though, others expressed interest and the project grew.

Larry and his wife Laura later retired to

Penney Retirement Community in Penney Farms, Fla., in 2000 and began exploring ways to establish a production site to continue the work the group had started in Missouri. Beginning once again in a garage, the operation later moved to a small space next to a local auto repair shop where the first PET Cart was produced at Penney Retirement Community in 2001.

The operation continued to grow, and under Hills' leadership, a large facility was built in 2008 that later expanded into a larger warehouse. The site now also includes a metal shop, a refurbished office and a break room. PET International later changed its name to Mobility Worldwide, and the PET Cart became the Mobility Cart.

Hills has since retired from the operation, and the task of continuing his job now lays with many, including Dave Quirk and Sid Rooy, office coordinators at Mobility Worldwide at Penney Retirement Community.

The Mobility Worldwide shop at Penney Retirement Community builds and ships on average 800 Mobility Carts a year, and residents there recently built and shipped their 11,000th cart. Since 1994 more than 80,000 Mobility Carts have been built across the country and distributed in 106 countries.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

It was a dark and rainy Monday morning in October when Quirk turned on the lights, began brewing his coffee and started his shift. Soon the once-silent workshop would be filled with the sounds of table saws, power tools and welding torches.

"Here's our paycheck," Quirk said as he pointed to before and after pictures of a person crawling on the ground and then using one of their Mobility Carts. "Now this person not only has the gift of mobility, but (the cart) lets this person bring back dignity to themselves, and contribute to the community."

On the walls of the workshop hang countless pictures of happy recipients and a world map littered with red dots, representing the countries where carts have been shipped. The shop also has all the tools and supplies one could imagine and is divided into different sections and stations.

"We can make pretty much anyone productive in five minutes," Quirk said. "Our stations are set up like a General Motors assembly



Thanks to his PET cart and generous donations, Anthony now runs a small business selling candy, and water. He says the cart provided him a second life.

station with patterns and jigs in place to help guide the person who is manning the station."

This is necessary due to the large variety of volunteers who work in the shop throughout the year.

"Last year we had over 12,000 volunteer hours, 7,000 of which came from residents at Penney Retirement Community," Quirk said. "We get people from all over the country and all ages that come and volunteer. We partner with Ridgeview High School here in town. Students working on their International Baccalaureate degree need 10 hours of international community service, and we're the best place for that in town.

"But we also have people from churches or families that volunteer their time. We have one family that picks a not-for-profit each year for their family reunion and donates their time. In they come with kids 8 to 9 years old all the way up to great grandpas that are 90 years or older. We have something to do for everyone."

The Mobility Cart is a sturdy, three-wheeled vehicle propelled by hand-crank or pull handle that can be operated by a man, woman or child who is mobility impaired. Designed to function in some of the world's most remote regions, the mobility cart is built on a frame consisting of steel and wood. Every cart is built from scratch by volunteers.

"There are five criteria for our mobility carts," Quirk said. "They have an undercarriage made out of steel, they have an industrial strength chain, wood for easy local repairs, solid rubber tires and a space for storing capacity. If you ask someone to make a cart, it would cost roughly

\$600 to \$700, but because of our donations and volunteering, it only costs \$300 and given at no cost to the recipient."

Senior Volunteers Lend a Hand

The Mobility Worldwide shop located on the campus of Penney Retirement Community was the second affiliate workshop and is now part of 29 workshops around the country that develop the Mobility Carts. Carts built at the Penney Retirement Community location however, have a unique distinction – they're multicolored. This makes them recognizable compared to others. They are so distinctive that one of Penney Retirement Community's residents recognized one of their carts in Guatemala, said Office Coordinator Sid Rooy.

"Our residents John and Kay worked 20 years in the mountains of Ecuador and 15 years in the mountains of Guatemala," Rooy said. "They decided to return to visit their old colleagues, and they ran into someone riding a multicolored cart. Kay walks up to the man and asks him how long he's had his mobility cart, to which the man replied that he celebrated his fourth birthday last month. Confused, Kay asks, 'What do you mean?'"

"Before I crawled in the dirt and I was totally dependent, said the man. I had to beg for everything I got. Then I got my mobility cart. I was able to start my own business, I got married, I have a baby and I can support my family. When I received my mobility cart my second life started. I have two birthdays now. One the good Lord gave me, and one that the cart gave me."



Penny Retirement Community residents enjoy volunteering their time to build the carts.

“We've had people that come in and perform a certain task for several years who then developed dementia. Their spouse will bring them into the shop because they remember a certain activity because they did it for years and continue their constructive activity.”

Dave Quirk, Office Coordinator
Mobility Worldwide at Penny Retirement Community



The evolution of the Mobility Cart can be seen hanging from the ceiling at the Mobility Worldwide shop at Penny Retirement Community.

Rooy spent 36 years teaching in Latin America and had students in his classes whose families, friends or members of their community lost limbs due to landmines or illness. When looking for a retirement community, he said the Mobility Worldwide project was key for him and his wife in choosing Penny Retirement Community.

“We have students who come from Ridgeway High that have to put in 10 hours

of international community service,” Rooy said. “I had one girl who was born and raised in Pakistan who came in and worked 27 hours as opposed to the required 10. When I signed her form, I said most students only come in and work 10. You came in and worked 27 hours, why is that?”

Rooy paused as he fought back tears.

“She looked me in the eye and said, ‘Because I feel at home here,’” he said. “That’s

the spirit we have here. Anybody who comes and works here is part of a family because you’re working on something for the good of other people. You’re investing your life constructively. I think that’s why we have a higher rate of men living and living longer in our community than in other communities that I’ve visited. Because we have people who are active and who are working. They are the ones carrying the ball.”

Quirk added: “Our community’s life expectancy is 89 years compared to the average of 79 in the United States. We can find something to do for anyone here. Sometimes we have people with disabilities who may not be able to operate machinery come in and count and verify parts or work on mobility cart assembly instructions. We’ve had people that come in and perform a certain task for several years who then developed dementia. Their spouse will bring them into the shop because they remember a certain activity because they did it for years and continue their constructive activity.”

Families and recipients send pictures and stories back to the shop at Penny Retirement Community to let them know how the carts are doing, whether improvements could be made, and how it has made an impact on their lives.

“It’s one of the reasons I keep coming back,” Quirk said. “To hear the stories of the people that you’ve given the gift of mobility and how it has impacted their lives.”

Rain or shine, people from across the state and country continue to come as they can and leave as they must to donate their time for the betterment of others, such as Anthony Wanyoike, the 37-year old Kenyan whose disability at birth left him forced him to crawl.

Through Mobility Worldwide and one of its distribution partners, Partners for Care, Anthony was able to get his own Mobility Cart. A local pastor, Milka Njambi, also raised funds to purchase a cool box, candy, water, biscuits and handkerchiefs for Anthony to start his own business. He is grateful for the donation and says he no longer has to crawl on the ground, and his business will help him become self-sustainable. He can be seen driving his cart around town with a smile from ear to ear. He says his dreams are now a reality thanks to the donation.

To find how out you can get involved, visit www.mobilityworldwide.org.