

Austin Post-Bulletin

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Fun activities for an
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Marine keeps fighting

Challenges now come in different form

By Brett Boese
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When Dan Stewart gets behind the wheel April 4 to take his driver's test, it will mark a milestone. The Marine was injured so badly by a roadside IED seven years ago in Iraq that two military field hospitals denied him care for fear that the 2003 Hayfield graduate was already past the point of saving.

The 27-year-old Austin resident credits his fellow Marines with saving his life; they refused medical treatment until their stricken comrade was helped.

"We're brothers-in-arms," Stewart said Thursday. "We're family. Who would let their blood brother just die when he could be getting help to live?"

The American flag flown above the medical facility in Fallujah, Iraq, where an unconscious Stewart finally found care, now hangs in his bedroom.

Not that he needs another reminder of his long road to recovery.

The veteran of three tours in Iraq spent 32 days in a coma after having most of the right side of his head "pushed in" by shrapnel.

While in that coma, Stewart suffered a stroke that affects his left side. He's undergone at least 10 surgeries since then, including a complicated cranioplasty, which inserted two metal plates in the right side of his head.

Unfazed, Stewart has forged ahead in an effort to rejoin civilian life. He's received help from new friends.

Guardian angel

In 2006, MaryAnn Lynch met Stewart at St. Edwards Catholic Church in Austin. Some call Lynch his "guardian angel." She and her husband routinely drive him to appointments and help with everyday activities, such as cooking.

Perhaps more importantly, Lynch helped him land a position at the church. Stewart now volunteers five days a week doing tasks such as shoveling, mowing and raking.



Joe Michaud-Scorza / jscorza@postbulletin.com

Marine Dan Stewart, of Austin, rakes with the help of Lend-A-Hand, a device that helps him perform an array of tasks.

"He has a lot of drive," Lynch said. "And I don't think he's alone. Most (veterans) don't want to be considered wounded warriors. They want to be involved in the community — and life — again."

However, being physically challenged — he hates the term "handicapped" — means many of Stewart's activities are modified. For example, his left arm has limited mobility, so he'll drive with one hand.

With Lynch's help, Stewart's also found a unique offering that's made everyday activities easier.

Lend-A-Hand

Mike Duncan, of Red Wing, developed a product called Lend-A-Hand. It straps on

to the leg or forearm with a small opening into which an item — such as a rake, shovel, knife or fishing rod — might be placed.

Duncan has gone through seven models in his quest to perfect the product. On Thursday, he gave Stewart his latest version — a \$130 "all-inclusive" model that won't be released to the general public until Sunday.

It's Stewart's third version of Lend-A-Hand since 2009.

"It just frustrated the hell out of me that I couldn't rake like a normal person," Stewart said. "(Lend-A-Hand has) definitely enabled me to do my job better. Even though it's just a volunteer job, it's still a job, and I want to do it right."

Council votes to euthanize dangerous dog

Owner sought to spare animal's life

By Heather Rule
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The Austin City Council denied an owner's appeal Monday of a city dangerous dog declaration and voted that her dog should be destroyed.

The owner's appeal for her dog came after it killed another dog on March 9.

"We have a responsibility to the people in Austin," said Mayor Tom Stiehm.

A Yorkshire terrier died from injuries it suffered after owner Susan Strack's pit bull attacked it. The pit bull also bit a man who was walking the leashed Yorkie on a sidewalk along 10th Avenue Northeast, according to Austin Police Chief Brian Krueger.

The appeal by Strack, filed March 21, was two-fold, according to City Attorney David Hoversten. Strack appealed the dangerous dog declaration and appealed that the dog be destroyed. Had the council chosen the option to declare the dog dangerous but that it should not be destroyed, Strack would have needed to comply with a long list of regulations, including a proper enclosure, warning signs and proof annually of a minimum \$300,000 insurance policy.

Austin City Council member Steve King said it was necessary to separate fact from emotion during the hearing. Based on the evidence presented, he said, it was clear that the dog needed to be euthanized and referred to this particular pit bull as "a public safety issue."

Community Service Officer Ernesto Cantu, who responded to the scene, recommended that the dog be destroyed because it could happen again.

Strack disagreed with Cantu, saying it would never happen again because she'd go through the necessary steps Hoversten described. She also wanted to make the point that her dog has been fine with other dogs in the pound, where it's been since the incident.

Strack fought back tears while addressing the council and said she was sorry that this happened, called it a tragedy and said she hasn't been able to sleep.

She's never had any issues in the past when she's let her dog outside, Strack said. Her dog is also "obsessed with squirrels" and watches them daily from inside the house, she said. On the day of the attack, Strack had told Cantu she came running out of the house and tried to pull her dog off of the Yorkie, according to the police report.

"She didn't see the man," Strack said of her dog. "All she saw was a dog, which looked like a squirrel."

"I don't think my dog would have done that if she had known it was somebody's pet. She's not like that."

Donald Petersen, who was walking the Yorkie owned by his daughter, Mary McGrane, said his biggest concern was the responsibility of the dog owner. He said the dog should be on a leash and that it is irresponsible of the owner to let it run as it did.

"The minute she opened that door, that dog was in attack mode," Petersen said. "It was an instinctive thing."

Afterward, McGrane said, "I don't think anybody wins in this. It's a tragedy all around."

McGrane said the dog has been with her through a divorce, a move and other significant events.

"It was the most I cried in my whole life," McGrane said. "I don't have my dog anymore."

Whose car is that in my bed?

By Kay Fate
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A 32-year-old man is in the Mower County Jail awaiting charges after he allegedly drove drunk into a building.

According to the police report, the vehicle struck the southwest corner of the building at 600 14th St. N.W. about 1:30 a.m. Sunday, causing significant structural damage and a gas leak.

The driver fled the scene, the report says, but was caught and arrested a short time later.

The apartment resident, Brian Brandt, arrived home from work following the crash.

"When I pulled up, I could

see the car, but I didn't know how far inside it was," he said Monday. "I just got as far as the (bedroom) door, but I figured I'd better not open it. It was pretty bad."

Brandt could hear the gas leak, he said. "I kept waiting for the place to go up in smoke."

When he was allowed in later with the police and fire department, he saw how lucky he'd been to be at work.

After destroying the outside wall, the car came to rest on Brandt's bed. The resulting debris sent pieces of shrapnel through the opposite wall and split a TV in half, in addition to the damage to the rest of the room.

The other residents in the building were evacuated, said Mower County Sheriff Terese Amazi, "due to the severity of the gas leaks."

Gina Grundmeier, the building's caretaker, said Monday that the gas remained shut off, leaving residents without heat or hot water.

"We just met with (Austin) Utilities; we're trying to get them hot water," she said. "The utilities is eye-balling things. We need to get some temporary tanks in here."

Grundmeier called Sunday's scene "kind of mind-numbing at first. A guy from across the street actually shut the car off and had everybody evacuate the building."

Brandt "certainly" would have been injured if he'd been home in bed, she said.

"Everything flew clear across the room, and his bed is just covered" with debris, Grundmeier said. "He's very lucky. Very lucky."

The Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department, Gold Cross Ambulance, Austin Utilities and Red Cross responded to the scene. No injuries were reported.

The driver is expected to be charged today. The Austin Post-Bulletin typically doesn't name suspects until they've been charged.



Joe Michaud-Scorza / jscorza@postbulletin.com

The bedroom of Brian Brandt is covered with rubble Monday after an alleged drunken driver drove through his wall Sunday, landing on top of his bed in Austin. Brandt was on his way home from work when the car barreled into his home. "I'm just crossing my fingers that he's got insurance," said Brandt. "I don't know what I'll do if he doesn't. I'll just have to make do."

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59
36 6 a.m. Noon 6 p.m.
38° 54° 58a°

Corrections

The Post-Bulletin is committed to fairness and accuracy. If you have a concern, contact Managing Editor Jay Furst at 285-7742 or furst@postbulletin.com.

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"Three carats."

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