Making a Difference: Reinventing the Wheelchair

A Massachusetts man who suffered a catastrophic personal injury changes his life around by creating his own wheelchair recycling shop, where each year he turns out more than 100 custom-made chairs.

Keywords
- Wheelchair
- Accident
- Making a Difference
- Paralysis
- Cerebral Palsy
- "Wheelchair Recycler"
- Upgrade
- Custom
- Disability
- Handicap
- www.wheelchairrecycler.com

Citation
APA

CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

Transcript
Making a Difference: Reinventing the Wheelchair
BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
We're back and it's time for our MAKING A DIFFERENCE report tonight. And this evening we have the story of a man in Massachusetts who suffered a catastrophic personal injury, the kind that just changed your life in a second. And yet if you ask him whether he would change what happened to him, he selflessly answers no because, he says, it forced him into a life of making a difference for others who share his challenges. Our report tonight from NBC's Tom Costello.
TOM COSTELLO reporting:
Sometimes tragedy can lead to the most unexpected places.
Mr. DAVE HEIM: Brought this control out a little further this way.
COSTELLO: Dave Heim's tragedy was 14 years ago. A night of drinking led to a car accident and life-long paralysis. But today he's focused on 18-year-old Victoria Conrad. Cerebral palsy has twisted her arms away from the controls on her wheelchair.
So Dave has listened to what you need and he's making the changes.
Ms. VICTORIA CONRAD: Yeah.
COSTELLO: He's known as the wheelchair recycler, his workshop full of donated batteries, electronics, seats, tires and treads. There is no such thing, he says, as a small problem.
Mr. HEIM: You can't be without your chair for a week, let alone day.
COSTELLO: From a quick fix and upgrades to custom-made power chairs, Dave's little shop, struggling to break even, turns out more than 100 chairs each year. Still, if a family can't pay it doesn't. That caught the eye of the Christopher Reeve Foundation, which donated one of the late actor's chairs. The parts went to repair six other chairs. To kids like 15-year-old Hayley Sweeney in Vermont, once dependent on others to push her, she's now in one of Dave's power chairs and free.
Ms. HAYLEY SWEENEY: It's a great feeling to be able to just get into it and take off, just do what I want to do.
COSTELLO: A special track chair means the beach is no longer off limits.
Mr. JIM SWEENEY (Hayley's Father): He's given her her legs. She's been able to go places where, you know, after a certain point in time you can't carry your child everywhere and there's, you know, there's a lot of places where they just will never go.

COSTELLO: About his accident 14 years ago, Dave admits it was one of the dumbest things he's ever done. But does he regret it?

Mr. HEIM: I wouldn't change a thing. I wouldn't change a thing. The faces, the smiles that are on the faces that we've helped out is worth every hour I was in rehab, you know.

COSTELLO: Now he says life has meaning. Tom Costello, NBC News, Ashland, Massachusetts.