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Brazilian woman learns to walk again in Saginaw Township

by Justin Engel | The Saginaw News
Saturday June 27, 2009, 3:09 PM

Lohane Magarao, 20, uses her new prosthetic leg to take her first steps without crutches in 13 years at Michigan Orthopedic Services in Saginaw Township. Her physical therapist and interpreter, Ana Carolina Assumpcao, assists her.

Armando L. Sanchez | The Saginaw News



For the first time in 13 years, Lohane Magarao took two steps forward. The 20-year-old Rio de Janeiro resident accomplished the feat Friday in Saginaw Township, where Scott Baranek, a certified prosthetist with Michigan Orthopedic Services, fitted her with a \$35,000 right prosthetic leg.

"It is very emotional," Magarao said via an interpreter.

Friday's fitting was a test-run of the technology. The Brazilian will receive a more permanent appendage sometime late next week, Baranek said. Magarao lost her limb 13 years ago while standing at a bus stop in Brazil, where a car struck and sent her body into a sewage-filled ditch. The waste infected her mangled leg, forcing doctors to amputate. Since then, Magarao has used crutches to carry herself up and down the mountainside shanty town where she lives with her family. Wear and tear over the years left her with scars where the trunks of her crutches rubbed against her forearms. "She's been doing this for so many years," said Brian F. Sheridan, a Bay City native who now lives in Royal Oak. "She wakes up very early every morning and hikes down the mountain to catch a bus to work at a job that pays her about \$300 a month."

Even though Sheridan only met Magarao earlier this month, he's become a major player in her life.

Sheridan, a 33-year-old quadriplegic athlete and manager at the Detroit Medical Center's outpatient center, heard of Magarao's story when he met her former physical therapist and interpreter, Ana Assumpcao, during a handicapped sporting event in Bogota, Colombia, in November.

Inspired, Sheridan used his connections to bring Magarao to the U.S. earlier this month. He helped convince Michigan Orthopedic Services to sponsor the expensive appendage thanks to another connection: Baranek is his brother-in-law. "It was just one of those opportunities," Sheridan said. "When all of the stars align and you're able to do something of this magnitude, it just makes sense." The former basketball and football player at Bay City's John Glenn High

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School, where he graduated in 1993, sees plenty of potential in Magarao. Parts of her life reflect his. As a freshman at Central Michigan University, he joined an intramural gymnastics club to polish his fitness routine. After doing a back hand-spring off a training device, Sheridan bounced back in the air, became disoriented and landed on his head. Doctors at Mount Pleasant's Central Michigan Community Hospital sent him to St. Mary's of Michigan hospital, where neurosurgeon Malcolm Field performed surgery to stabilize Sheridan's condition. Eight days on life support followed. Sheridan survived and began a career helping other people with disabilities. He founded Saginaw's Michigan Sports Unlimited, a nonprofit organization that promotes and coordinates wheelchair recreational activities, and once worked at the Field Neurosciences Institute.

He's taken up several wheelchair sports, including rugby. He notes a similar determination to excel in Magarao. "You can see that she demands success," Sheridan said.

Magarao enjoys "sitting volleyball," which has all the features of traditional volleyball minus the legwork. She also is registered to play in Michigan's Extremity Games for people with lost limbs. The event, hosted in various cities across Michigan from Thursday to Saturday, July 9-11, includes rock climbing and kayaking.

Following her first walk on Friday, Magarao's demeanor seemed to reflect her competitive resolve. Supporting her weight between twin handlebars, she gingerly took her first steps with the prosthetic with Baranek's help. The prosthetist -- who wears a similar prosthetic for his left leg -- told Magarao it would take time to adjust to the change. Magarao disagreed, her interpreter said.

"Because she wants this so much, she says it's going to be easy," Assumpcao said. "I need to walk. Now," she says. "Magarao is due to fly home Tuesday, July 14. She said her mother and father likely will cry when she arrives at the airport. "Her dream is to be able to get out of the plane and carry her luggage while walking," Assumpcao said. "She says this is more than a dream for her. She never thought this would happen."

Michigan Orthopedic Services' mission of *Maximizing Independence through timeliness, quality and excellence* drives our commitment to our patients and the community. It is through opportunities such as this that we bring together health care providers and professionals to make a difference in the communities we serve. Please visit our website at www.michortho.com to learn of other community events in your neighborhood.

