

# Able-bodied people walk in the shoes of those with disabilities

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

Omaha, Neb.-native Brent Rasmussen, 32, never imagined he'd be a paralympic athlete, but a horrific accident in 2002 changed everything for the mortgage broker. Rasmussen says he was trying to help a motorist who had lost control of her car and skidded off the road one snowy day when another car struck him, ripping off his left leg and severely damaging his right.

"I went back to the vehicle and boom! My life changed completely," he related. "...as I laid in the ditch for half an hour, I thanked God I had life insurance, because I wasn't sure I was going to make it."

Yet Rasmussen has turned tragedy into triumph, competing on the international level as captain of the U.S. Men's Sit Volleyball Team. Looking back at photographs of the accident months later, Rasmussen noticed that the mile marker where the accident occurred was number 422 — the same as his birth date.

"I realized this happened to me for a reason," he said. "This happened to me so I could go out and do bigger and better things."

Rasmussen shared his story with a group of more than 300 Allegacy employees Monday, as part of an initiative known as the Paralympic Experience, which tries to help able-bodied people to experience life as a person with a disability, if only for a few minutes.

The Experience is sponsored by The Hartford, a noted investment firm. The company is the founding sponsor of the Paralympics, a competition amongst world class athletes who happen to have physical disabilities.

"The ability philosophy is



Employees try to play volleyball as a paralympic would.

the bedrock of our company," said John Carideo, assistant director of Brand Development and Program Management for The Hartford. "Let's concentrate on what an individual can do, as opposed to what he or she can't do."

In the Paralympics, which are held every four years in the same cities that host the Olympic Games, athletes compete in a variety of sports, from boccia, to cycling, equestrian and swimming, among other things. Modifications are made to the sports to make them possible for people with disabilities.

Allegacy employees tried their hands at sitting volleyball and wheelchair sprints Monday, as part of the experience.

"It was hard," admitted Allegacy Relationship Manager Napoleon



Brent Rasmussen speaks to Allegacy employees.

Richardson, who took part in both events. "It's a little more difficult than it looks." The experience has given

him a new respect for people with disabilities, Richardson added. "I've always tried to treat



Napoleon Richardson

people the same regardless (of their abilities)," he said. "But now I have a greater appreciation for it."

The Experience is part of a growing commitment, the credit union is making to improve the health of its employees under its new All Health initiative, explained Ashley Kohlrus, director of Learning and Organizational Development. The employees took well to the program, she added.

"I think it's been phenomenal," Kohlrus said. "Our employees have been extremely receptive."

The point of the experience is to teach people that those with disabilities are capable of virtually anything their able bodied counterparts can do, and to give them hope should they ever find themselves in a similar situation, Carideo said.

"It's important for able bodied people to understand that if they do become disabled, their life isn't over," he remarked. "You can still live an active, normal and productive life."

For more information about the Paralympics, visit [www.usparalympics.org](http://www.usparalympics.org).

## Hanesbrands holding another fundraising sale

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Hanesbrands Inc. will hold a second community product sale on Saturday, Oct. 17, to raise money for the United Way and one of its member agencies. The sale will be held from 8 a.m. to 2

p.m. in the parking lot at West Forsyth High School, 1735 Lewisville-Clemmons Road in Clemmons.



Drago

An early October sale at Hanesbrands' Weeks plant drew more than 5,000 shoppers and raised \$186,000 for the United Way. Past community sales have been so successful that Hanesbrands decided to add the second sale in Clemmons. All proceeds will be shared by United Way and the YMCA of Northwest N.C., a United Way agency.

"We are extremely grateful for the huge support that Hanesbrands provides to United Way — and for the creative way they go about raising money through the community product sale. Not only do they donate all these wonderful products, but their employees also donate their time to make these events a big success each year," said Ron Drago, president and CEO, United Way of Forsyth County.

Hanesbrands will donate more than six tractor-trailer loads of apparel, and more than 100 volunteers from the YMCA, West Forsyth High School, United Way and Hanesbrands will donate their time before, during and after the sale.

The sale will feature products from the company's top brands, including Hanes, Champion, Playtex, Bali, Just My Size, Leggs and Outer Banks. Most apparel is priced between 50 cents and \$8 and includes bras, panties, hosiery, tights, socks, sweatshirts and sport shirts.



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