

GENE SMITH demonstrates the "Ary Lift," which elevates bedridden individuals so they can be easily bathed. Lying in the bed is a friend, Brad Vanderburg.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte Man Makes Home Care Easier With Invention

BY DOUG RUTTER

Gene Smith of Shallotte has tinkered, designed and fixed things for most of his life. Not until recently, though, could the machine and welding shop owner be considered an official inventor.

Smith was issued two patents in December, including one for a device that lends a helping hand to people who care for bedridden loved ones.

The "Ary Lift," which is used with a conventional bed, allows care-givers to bathe, change or turn a patient without straining.

A small electric motor provides all the power that's needed. The patient lies on washable nylon straps covered with sheepskin for comfort and can be raised or lowered with the push of a button.

By adjusting the straps, the person can be turned from side to side every couple of hours to keep bedsores from developing.

"With this," said Smith, "you can do the work in half the time with half the effort."

The lift doesn't take up much more room than an ordinary bed. "It utilizes the room above a person," he pointed out.

The "Ary Lift" is named after the woman for whom it was invented, Ary Ferrell of Loris, S.C.

A stroke in October 1990 left Ary paralyzed, blind and speechless. "She's totally helpless," said her husband, Abe Ferrell.

Ferrell approached his friend Smith about a year ago and asked him if he could invent something that would help him care for his bedridden wife.

The 79-year-old Ferrell needed a device that would allow him to lift and turn his wife from side to side without hurting his back.

In this case, necessity was indeed the mother of invention. And Smith delivered.

"If you came over here and offered me \$70,000 for it I wouldn't take it," Ferrell said of the lift. "I'd chase you out of the house."

With the "Ary Lift," Ferrell said he can easily bathe or shower his wife. A large pan slides in under the patient during bathing, and a water bag and shower attachment hang from one end of the bed.

"I couldn't take care of my wife if I didn't have it," Ferrell said. "I would have to have somebody here with me. It's just wonderful."

Smith, who has only made a handful of the lifts so far, said the best thing about it is that it can help families of the estimated one million Americans who are bedridden.

"That's the most exciting thing to me," he said. "It would be helping loved ones stay together rather than sending their loved ones to a nursing home."

Smith's inventing bug didn't stop with the patient lift. He also received a patent last month for a trolling plate that can be attached to boats with inboard motors.

The "Sea Troll" uses metal flaps that can be opened and closed with water pressure provided by motion of the boat. The purpose is to reduce the trolling speed of fishing boats.

Boats that normally idle at 5 mph can be slowed down to 2 mph with the use of the plate. Smith said the 5 mph trolling speed is too fast for live bait fishing.

Another patent is in the works for a metal sleeve that increases the size of boat rudders.

"I've built things for people and designed things for people for many years. I never really thought about getting a patent," said Smith.

"I used to think everything had been invented. I'm finding out that's not the case. People can do a lot of things if they set their mind to it."

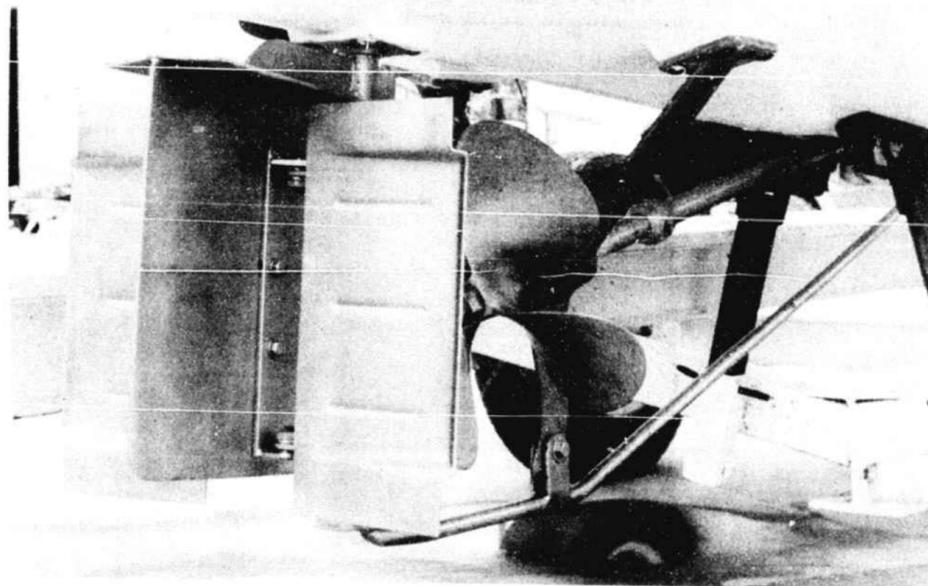


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