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James Fuller
on the move
again thanks
to AHF

American House Foundation Helps Wounded Man Keep Walking

By Cheryl Deep

Two years ago, James Fuller felt hopeful and happy. His diabetes and blood pressure were well controlled with medications, and after searching for work for several months, he had finally landed a job in construction. But a few days into the job, James took a hard step forward onto a nail sticking through a piece of wood. It drove through his shoe and deep into the ball of his foot.

"I was new on that job," James says, "and I didn't want to lose it, so I didn't tell anybody. I pulled my foot off the nail and kept working." He ignored the intense pain, washed out the wound when he got home, and figured it would heal. "I'm not sick much and I usually heal fast. I tried not to think about it."

But it didn't heal. Within a week his foot and entire lower leg swelled to twice their size. "That scared me," James, now 61, said. "I couldn't hide it no more so I came to Cabrini Clinic to have it looked at." Cabrini Clinic shares its modest space with Most Holy Trinity Montessori School on Sixth Street in Detroit. It provides free medical services for about 150 uninsured persons, many of whom earn too little to afford supplemental insurance and too much to qualify for Medicaid. The out-of-pocket expenses at a hospital or doctor's office are beyond their reach. Cabrini musters a volunteer army of physicians, nurses, and pharmacists – many from Henry Ford Health Systems -- who donate hours each week to see these patients at the clinic free of charge. James came there regularly for diabetes check-ups, insulin and blood pressure medicine.

Cabrini's Sr. Lenora Benda saw James when he first hobbled into the clinic. "Our doctors could see right away that his infection was beyond what we could treat here. We sent him directly to Detroit Receiving," she says, where he spent three days in the hospital. "They drilled a hole in the top of my foot to try to flush out the infection. I got all kinds of antibiotics, a whole month of them by IV at home. Nothing worked."

Two years later, despite obeying doctor's orders, James still had an open sore on the ball of his foot. The daily dressing changes reduced the size of his ulcer but could not eliminate it. "The doctors told him he needed special shoes to ease the pressure so it could heal," Sr. Lenora said. "We found podiatrist Mark Squire of Henry Ford Cottage Hospital Wound Care Center, who was willing to treat him for free and Knight pharmacist, Greg Baise, who donated the \$75 cost of James'

medication. But he also needed special shoes to relieve pressure on the wound. They cost \$500. No one had that kind of money."

American House Foundation did. Cary Piani, associate manager of programs for the American Diabetes Association in Detroit, learned about James' special needs at about the same time she heard of the recent creation of the American House Foundation, devoted to helping older adults in Detroit with medical and housing needs. "I called and put Cabrini Clinic in touch with American House Foundation. It was the perfect match for James," she said.



Sister Lenora and James Fuller receive the AHF check that will buy him special diabetic shoes

Sr. Lenora helped to fill out the forms and within a few weeks, James had a \$500 check from the American House Foundation to pay for the custom-molded diabetic shoes from Wright & Filippis that will allow his foot wound to finally heal. "And they even look nice," said James with a wide grin and a laugh. "I got to wear them all the time, so I picked a style and color that goes with everything."

Sr. Mary Ellen Howard, RSM, is the executive director of Cabrini Clinic, and cautioned James about the dangers of foot injuries for diabetics.

"The feet are very vulnerable when you are a diabetic," Sister Mary Ellen told him. "Don't put them at risk. We want to keep you up and walking."

James hopes to do more than walk. "I'd like to dance, too," he said. He promised to continue eating well and getting regular check-up at the clinic for his diabetes and blood pressure. "I couldn't have gotten these shoes without American House Foundation," he said. "I thank them greatly."

Sr. Lenora added that Cabrini Clinic is very grateful that American House Foundation was receptive to their request. "We appreciate their kindness and generosity," she said. "The new shoes will eliminate James' pain and make him very happy. We like to keep James smiling."

To learn more about gifts from American House Foundation, call 313-875-6834.