

# WHIRLWIND

Wheelchair



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[www.whirlwindwheelchair.org](http://www.whirlwindwheelchair.org)



## Dear Friends and Supporters,

In 2016, Whirlwind remained busy developing our next innovative wheelchair designs, putting together new projects, redesigning our website and broadening our International Program to include post-disaster humanitarian assistance wheelchairs, among other efforts.

One of our most exciting new projects is ready to launch in Medellin, Colombia, where a strong local team with international support is preparing to conduct a needs assessment with funding from the Colombian government. This project is being kicked off in the context of the current peace process aimed toward ending a 68-year old civil war, and we expect that once a peace agreement is finally reached, the wheelchairs and services to be provided will be in the vanguard of post-conflict programs aimed at re-integrating former guerilla fighters from remote rural areas. Read about our program and our partners on page 3.

Design work continues on our OmniRider™ wheelchair, which is intended to be a lighter weight version of the RoughRider® with greater indoor maneuverability. We plan to market a version of the OmniRider in the U.S. and Canada through our sales agent, RoughRider America. Along with our Georgian partners, we continue to make improvements on the power add-on kit for the RoughRider, it is described on our website.

We continue work on improving our supply chain. These efforts include arranging for the Vietnam manufacture of the Diversability Development Organization (DDO) designed wheelchair cushion – as described in last year's Newsletter available on our Web site – and currently manufactured only in China, and improving quality control at factories in China and Vietnam that make the RoughRider.

While Whirlwind has had many successes in 2016, we continue to strive to improve the efficiency of our international wheelchair design team and to overcome the limitations of working at vast distances and in 3 different languages and on a more limited budget than in the past. In this age of computer software and internet video communication, there is no substitute for frequent in-person collaboration in a metal workshop.

Please contribute generously this year. Your donations will help us continue to innovate, to bring our dispersed design team together more frequently, and to get more wheelchairs and better wheelchairs to the people who most need them.

You may send us a check or make a donation online at [www.whirlwindwheelchair.org/donate](http://www.whirlwindwheelchair.org/donate) to help us continue our important work. Never forget: *As you help Whirlwind you help change the world.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Krizack".

Marc Krizack, Executive Director

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## Supporting the Peace Process in Colombia

Whirlwind is supporting an initiative to make the RoughRider® and appropriate wheelchair services available in rural areas affected by the armed conflict in Colombia. Colombia has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth – not only in South America but in the entire world. It also has the longest internal armed conflict in the Americas, which began in 1948. After negotiations lasting more than 4 years, it appeared that peace was at hand, but a surprising 50.2% “No” vote, with only 32% of Colombians voting in the October 2016 popular referendum, has sent the government and the oldest Marxist rebel group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) back to the negotiating table. Even more surprising is that Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts a few days after the “No” vote. The close vote and low voter participation plus the unexpected Nobel Award have put pressure on all parties to reach a revised peace agreement promptly.

Once a definitive accord is reached, the country is expecting significant financial support from the international community for social investment in the neglected regions, with emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women, indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, people with disabilities, and the LGBT community. The European Union has already pledged 500 million dollars. As one of the initiatives to bring programs and services to the regions and their vulnerable populations, the Ministry of Health asked Whirlwind’s local partners to present a proposal for a pilot project in Medellín and the surrounding Department of Antioquia – one of the regions most affected by the conflict – to assess the need for wheelchairs and then to implement actions to address that need. The project’s objectives also include building capacity in the local community for appropriate wheelchair provision within existing community based rehabilitation program activities.

The initiative that we presented to the government is a collaboration between Whirlwind and three Colombian organizations: 1. The recently formed Center for Technology and Social Innovation in Disability at Universidad CES, a 39 year-old university, located in Medellín, that has received the highest accreditation by the Ministry of Education; 2. El Comité de Rehabilitación, a widely respected nonprofit with more than 35 years of working experience in the disability field including assistive technology provision, rehabilitation services, and community based rehabilitation; and 3. Rotary Club Medellín with more than 50 years of experience supporting social initiatives in Medellín and throughout Colombia. Rotary Club members in Sacramento, California are working to raise funds for the project as well.



Funding from the Colombian government to execute this proposal is currently stalled and believed to be dependent on the implementation of the peace accord. All of Colombia is anxiously awaiting the outcome of peace negotiations. Hopefully, peace for Colombians and greater inclusion for people with disabilities are just around the corner.

*Doing wheelies in Cali, Colombia*



## International Development & Humanitarian Assistance

Whirlwind's international activities are primarily considered development assistance, and our development strategy up until 2009 had been to establish small or medium scale production shops that manufacture and sell wheelchairs locally and regionally, the most recent example being the Coalition for Independent Living factory in the Republic of Georgia.

Since then, due to increasing start-up cost issues as well as the complexity of sustaining small manufacturing businesses in a global economy, Whirlwind has explored different production strategies, including setting-up assembly shops instead of full on manufacturing shops, for example, in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. We are currently working to start another assembly shop in Medellin, Colombia along with other services and programs for people with disabilities (see article on page 3).

Most of Whirlwind's RoughRider® wheelchairs are now manufactured in two large factories in China and Vietnam and then sold primarily to humanitarian assistance organizations. They in turn provide the wheelchairs to persons who need them in disaster or conflict zones or to persons with mobility disabilities who are too poor to purchase a wheelchair. Our donor partners include the Walkabout Foundation, Mormon Church, Rotary Club, USAID, UCP/Wheels for Humanity, and Global Mobility USA. RoughRiders have been provided to persons with disabilities in over 75 countries.

Today there is growing demand for wheelchairs due to the increase in natural disasters, war and conflict. Mainstream humanitarian assistance programs may meet some of the basic needs of displaced persons with disabilities (food, shelter, sanitation), but basic disability needs go largely unmet. Therefore, Whirlwind is creating our own small humanitarian assistance program and will immediately begin raising funds to send containers of RoughRiders, D-Slim Pressure Relief Cushions, and other specialized mobility equipment and disability medical supplies to countries where they are desperately needed. Whirlwind also plans to raise funds to provide basic level wheelchair provision training,

*Out and about on his own for the first time. First RoughRider reaches an isolated village in northern Eritrea*



according to World Health Organization (WHO) standards, to locally identified professionals and disabled persons organizations, so that WHO wheelchair provision standards are also introduced along with our RoughRider wheelchairs. We are actively exploring start up of this initiative in Libya and other countries in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Region that have been affected by war and displacement and hope to launch it in early 2017.

*Indonesian mother comforts daughter seated on foot-rest; casters underneath foot-rest keep RoughRider from tipping*



## OmniRider™ Wheelchair Design Update

The current RoughRider® model performs exceptionally well when self-propelled or when pushed from behind in a wide range of physical environments. It is durable, long lasting, and inexpensive to produce and repair. In fact, the RoughRider has become the wheelchair of choice for many users with good upper body strength who desire an active lifestyle. No single wheelchair design, however, is perfect for everyone due to different strengths and weaknesses and individual preferences and needs.

In response to user feedback, Whirlwind is developing the lighter weight OmniRider™ wheelchair, keeping the best features of the RoughRider, including the wide front casters, long wheelbase, and multiple rear-axle positions. The OmniRider differs from the RoughRider in that it will use a rigid frame with push button removable wheels and a fold-down backrest for easy transport. An optional sliding seat mechanism will allow the user to easily move the seat forward and backward several inches while seated to allow the user to get closer to and underneath a dining table or closer to a toilet when transferring, thus increasing maneuverability indoors. It will be easier to go up steep ramps and hills safely, too.

Whirlwind's international OmniRider design team has produced 2 prototypes so far. The first was built by our factory partner, Kien Tuong in Vietnam. The second prototype was developed this past July in the Republic of Georgia with our partner, the Coalition for Independent Living. We hope to have the new design in production in early 2018.



*Whirlwind's OmniRider design team from left to right: Alexander Afonin, Marc Krizack, Levan Talakhadze and Indriyanto Dijono.*

## If Bike Wheels Could Be Used on Wheelchairs

Whirlwind's Ralf Hotchkiss continues to work on adapting the Huckstep fork, an ingenious Ugandan design from over 50 years ago, to the RoughRider® to allow the replacement of a broken wheelchair wheel with the front wheel of a bicycle that is far more available and quite cheap. Ronald Huckstep, an Australian surgeon who led a team of Ugandan craftsmen in 1965, welded half of a bicycle fork outside of each drive wheel to support the end of a standard bicycle axle. Supporting both ends of a bicycle axle makes the axle strong enough for heavy use. This can solve the great difficulty that wheelchair riders have in finding replacement wheelchair wheels throughout most of the developing world. A broken wheel can mean that the rider is forced back in bed, back to infections and pressure sores, back too often to die.

With a Huckstep Fork, all the rider needs is a front bicycle wheel that can be bought in any bicycle shop. Repair using bicycle wheels has been so easy that far more repairs get completed – and the life of a typical Huckstep chair appears to have been more than doubled! Unfortunately, the Huckstep fork adds weight and width to the chair, but if the fork of the Huckstep wheelchair can be applied to the RoughRider, and if the extra weight and added width are minimal, then the easier maintenance should add a tremendous amount to the life of the chair. Local wheelchair manufacture would be less expensive too because builders could save the high cost of importing or making a custom hub. Given how many people need the best of chairs and how many need the chairs for a lifetime, the combination of Huckstep and Whirlwind could mean a lifetime of mobility from a single donated chair.



## SF Homeless Get Wheelchairs Repaired

For 12 years, Whirlwind has been providing free wheelchair repair to homeless people in San Francisco through San Francisco's model program, Project Homeless Connect. Project Homeless Connect partners with city leaders, community-based organizations, and volunteers from across the Bay Area to provide holistic and essential services to thousands of people who are at risk of becoming homeless, are currently homeless, or are transitioning from shelter to permanent housing.

Even though Whirlwind moved its base of operations from San Francisco across the Bay to Berkeley, Whirlwind staff and volunteers continue to participate and provide this much needed community service, held every other month at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium.

Organized and led by Bob Incerti, a multi-talented, long-time instructor and volunteer, Whirlwind's Homeless Connect program fixes all types of wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, and canes and, when resources allow, refurbishes or gives free wheelchairs to those whose chairs are beyond repair. In addition, Whirlwind staff and volunteers are available to help people learn about proper use and care of their wheelchairs and other mobility equipment as well as to provide information about what resources may be available to upgrade or obtain new wheelchairs or other assistive devices for persons with mobility disabilities.

At the October 19, 2016 Homeless Connect event, we queried a number of those who came to get their wheelchairs repaired about their experiences as wheelchair riders in San Francisco. Michael said, "This is my best option for getting my wheelchair fixed." Lena, a first-time beneficiary at Homeless Connect told us, "I got stuck on a Muni bus lift, and the fire department had to come and get me off and something broke. Now the back of my electric wheelchair has broken and is dangerous. I could use my MediCal/Medicare to eventually get this repaired, but I'm here today so I decided to see if I could get my wheelchair fixed now."

Gary was typical of many homeless wheelchair riders. "I'm here because I don't have another option to repair my wheelchair. I have MediCal/Medicare, but they don't cover my wheelchair, which is older. Also, it's impossible for me to set up a repair appointment with them because I'm homeless and don't have an address. I try to get them to meet me at a particular time and place, but since it isn't my residence, they won't do it. I can get most of my basic repairs done here. I don't know what I'd do without you."

*Note to the reader: If you would like to donate a good condition manual wheelchair, we will make sure it gets to a homeless person who really needs it.*



*Bob Incerti (left) and Ken Crizer repair wheelchairs at recent Project Homeless Connect event in San Francisco.*

## A Special Thanks

Thank you to Digital Strategist Gigi Michaels who designed our new website and for her ongoing dedication and development of the site. We are also very grateful for the funding provided by the Jennifer Taylor Honick Foundation for Humanity for the new and improved user experience.

Visit the new website at [www.whirlwindwheelchair.org](http://www.whirlwindwheelchair.org)

Gigi Michaels • Digital Strategist • 206.354.8144 • [gigimichaels@gmail.com](mailto:gigimichaels@gmail.com)

## RoughRiders® in our National Parks

Four years ago, Whirlwind began selling RoughRider® wheelchairs to Americans and Canadians who wanted a relatively inexpensive, durable, off-pavement wheelchair that would allow them to maneuver more easily and go further on paths and trails than other wheelchairs of comparable price. The RoughRider, designed to handle rugged terrain with ease and proven in over 50 countries by thousands of riders who live in the worst of conditions and need the best of wheelchairs, now serves for both daily use and when life summons off pavement adventures.

In the spirit of increasing access and opportunities for elderly persons and other visitors with mobility impairments, Whirlwind is reaching out to National and Historic Parks, as well as state and local parks and other institutions, about the disability inclusion and public accessibility benefits of having RoughRiders available for use by park visitors. To facilitate accessibility and a positive experience, many parks purchase wheelchairs that visitors can borrow or rent. However, most standard wheelchairs, including those that are marketed as suitable for use outdoors, have great difficulty off pavement.

RoughRider wheelchairs are easy to use for wheelchair riders who self propel or are pushed by others. We have already sold a few RoughRider wheelchairs to Mesa Verde National Park and to a few National Historic Parks, which have been utilized with great enthusiasm by visitors, according to the positive feedback we have received from NPS staff.



*Kelley Olenick explores Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve in Guerneville, California.*

## In Memoriam: Shelley Bergum 1953-2016



It is with the deepest sadness that we announce the passing of Shelley Bergum, beloved wife of Whirlwind Executive Director Marc Krizack and one of Whirlwind's founding Board members. Shelley was a national disability rights advocate; from 1990-2002, she was the Executive Director of the California Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP), and from 2002 until 2014, the President and CEO of the California Communications Access Foundation. She was also one of the original founders of the National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) and served on the Board of Directors of the Center Independent Living in Berkeley and on the Board of Directors of Disability Rights Advocates. Shelley's work improved the lives of millions of Americans with disabilities. She will be greatly missed.

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*All donations received or postmarked in 2016 are deductible in 2016*

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