

## Farmer is back to work thanks to SJMC's Hand and Upper Extremity Clinic

Knute Rockne would have liked Bernie Baltes. He's tough. He's got guts. And he tackles life's obstacles with incredible force. Two months ago, Bernie's obstacle was a tire explosion that nearly blew off his index finger, broke all the major bones in his left hand, fractured the remaining fingers and dislocated his wrist.

"I've been a farmer all of my life and I use my hands a lot," Bernie says. "I didn't have time for an injury. I had to work. I had to make a living."

The doctor who initially treated Bernie's hand injury referred him to Saint Joseph's Medical Center's Hand and Upper Extremity Clinic for therapy. The Hand Clinic is designed to provide patients with comprehensive, specialized rehabilitation for restoring functional use of their hands, arms

and shoulders. Here Bernie was assigned a personal hand therapist. After an initial evaluation, his therapist, Janet, designed a program to reduce his swelling and increase his flexibility.

had the accident on Friday night and by Saturday, I was setting an auger. I just used my right hand for most of the work and the splint for balance."

Janet believes this "hands on" approach has helped Bernie's recovery. "The best thing he could do to regain lost mobility is use his hand as normally as possible," she says. "Bernie is not afraid to do this, which works to his advantage."

Bernie follows a comprehensive home exercise program and

attends therapy at the Hand Clinic three times per week. Here his hand is exercised in a variety of ways to increase his flexibility. To reduce swelling, a Jobst Pump is used which intermittently applies air pressure through a sleeve compressing the injured part.

Bernie's progress has been noticeable since he began therapy



"Bernie helped me as a therapist by being straight forward," Janet says. "He told me exactly what he needed from me and what he planned to do at home, rather than tell me what he thought I'd like to hear."

"I told her to make the protective splint very secure because I planned to continue working," Bernie explains. "I

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two months ago. He came to Saint Joseph’s Hand Clinic with nine pins in his hand to stabilize his bones. Today his hand looks remarkably normal. While Janet is able to chart Bernie’s clinical progress, Bernie is more interested in his functional progress.

“If the progress isn’t functional, it’s useless,” Bernie says. “I have to use pliers, carry buckets, climb ladders, run the combine and drive my tractor. It’s how I make a living. Luckily, the progress is noticeable.”

Bernie attributes a degree of his success to the Hand Clinic’s

staff. “Their positive attitude was helpful in keeping my spirits high. They always had a smile and something cheerful to say. That helped me keep things in perspective.”

Bernie’s prognosis is good. He has approximately one month left of therapy. Due to nerve damage, he is unable to feel with his index finger and will, therefore, have to learn to keep his index finger out of his way during many daily activities. Bernie’s answer to this is, “I will find a way to do what I need to do.”

In addition to treating traumatic injuries, the Saint Joseph’s Hand Clinic treats many patients suffering from arthritis. For these patients, the Hand Clinic can provide individualized home exercise programs, as well as joint protection and energy conservation techniques. A branch of the Hand Clinic also is available at Holy Cross Parkview Hospital in Plymouth.

Patients may be referred to the Hand Clinic by any area doctor. For more information on the Hand Clinic, call 237-7438.

## **Parkview offers ElderLaw seminar in April**

Have you made adequate plans for your future? Have you thought about estate planning, lifetime giving plans and health-care decisions?

If you’re like most people, you don’t want to think about it. However, planning now when you have your health and know your preferences can save everyone a lot of confusion—and possibly money.

To help you with these decisions, Holy Cross Parkview Hospital is offering on Wednesday, April 15 a luncheon program titled “ElderLaw, Preparing Now for the Future: Legal, Financial and Healthcare Decisions.” This event, set for noon to 2 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Plymouth, is designed to assist people in beginning the planning process for their future. Guest speaker for the event is Michael Murphy, a South Bend lawyer and member of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.

Cost for the event is \$5 and includes lunch. Preregistration and prepayment are required. For further information, please call Ask-A-Nurse at 936-9977