

## Article Notes by Patricia Skalka

**Peter, Paul and Mimi** – they're not singers but they are a unique trio: each lost a leg in a horrific accident and each was helped to return to normal life by the same man, 62-year-old prosthetist Jan Stokosa.

Growing up, Stokosa learned the art and science from his father; then in 1967, he graduated from the first class of a pilot prosthetics program at Northwestern University. An acknowledged leader in the field, he goes the extra mile to understand the issues and problems that amputees face. Early on in his career, he hitched his right leg up at the knee and ambulated for weeks on an artificial leg. More recently he learned to ski amputee-style. His philosophy is simple: no pain.

That's not something most amputees hear. Two years after the plane crash that cost him his sight and left leg, Paul Cartman, 46, was in constant pain and unable to walk more than 25 or 30 feet. Despite having more than 11 different artificial limbs created for him at the University of Michigan, he was largely wheelchair-bound. After restorative surgery recommended by Stokosa and four weeks of working with the prosthetist, Cartman walked confidently and pain free. Three months later, he completed the Mackinaw Bridge Walk a distance of six miles.

Peter Thomas, 46, a successful Washington lawyer who advocates for the disabled, tells a similar story. Injured at 10, in a car accident that severed both his legs below the knees and killed his younger brother, he spent years on crutches before seeing Stokosa for the first time as a teen. He left pain free and went on to college, law school, marriage, family of three sons and a career. When he returned to Jan's care, Thomas had run the course with another prosthetist. He arrived at the Stokosa Clinic near Lansing MI in pain, with stumps that were red and raw. He walked out in comfort. An avid golfer, he can spend the day on the course, go out afterward and never feel a twinge.

So too for 47-year-old Mimi Rohlfing who lost her leg at 19 when a van ran a red light and smashed into the side of her car, leaving her to nearly bleed to death on the side of the road. Though she healed quickly physically, she felt her life had ended. After becoming Stokosa's patient, Mimi completed college, taught elementary school, sung on stage and danced in a vocal jazz ensemble. Today she is director of the Vocal Jazz Ensemble and a music instructor at Columbia College in Chicago.

For these three and hundreds of others, Jan Stokosa's skill and dedication has meant the difference between being disabled and leading a productive life. "What are you not doing that you want to do?" Stokosa asks his patients. It's a question we all ask ourselves. In seeing how one man helps the disabled reach their goals, we can all find the inspiration needed to reach higher.