

# Paralyzed hunter invents improved mobility wheelchair

BY MICHAEL BABCOCK • TRIBUNE OUTDOOR EDITOR • OCTOBER 16, 2008

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George Young was an avid outdoorsman: He hunted, fished, camped, skied — he was out there all the time. His favorite thing was bow hunting whitetails from a tree stand.

But in March of 2001, black ice between Ulm and Cascade changed his life forever. He wrecked his truck and the crash left Young paralyzed from the waist down.

Suddenly Young, a project manager/installer for S&H Aluminum Co. was relegated to a wheelchair.

"When you first get into a wheelchair it really sucks," Young said the other day at his home in the Fox Farm neighborhood.

But Young didn't mope: He made a wheelchair that can get him off the smooth, beaten path and back into the kind of country where he can hunt and fish. He cut up bicycles and other tubed steel items and began welding them together.

"I decided I had to get back out there," he said.

It took some tinkering, but before long, he had a three-wheeler with a seat for him and a place to carry things — like a backpack and a bow or a rifle — and big knobby tires. This different type of wheelchair was reliable enough that he could get down to the river bottoms to bow hunt, to streamside to fish and along closed off Forest Service roads where earlier this season he bugled in a six-point elk.

Last week, Young launched Axess Outdoors, a company in which he builds the IM or improved mobility wheelchair. With Axess Outdoors, Young aims to get those who have become wheelchair-bound back into the outdoors.

Cost of the IM is \$1,998 — the day-to-day wheelchair he sits in most of the time costs \$4,500 — and the IM is custom built for the individual as to size and fit.



Bowhunter George Young, above, takes aim at a 3-D target during the annual Kings Hill Archery Shoot held each July in the Little Belt Mountains. Below, Young's "Improved Mobility" wheel chair helps him hunt ducks at Freezout Lake. (COURTESY PHOTOS/GEORGE YOUNG)

At [www.axessoutdoors.com](http://www.axessoutdoors.com), you can watch an eight-minute video of Young using his IM wheelchair outdoors for hunting, fishing and limited carpentry. He even duck hunts at Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area.

Young had no intention of building wheelchairs to sell but fate stepped in.

"What I did was build this chair for myself. I had no intentions of selling it. Two years ago, I lost it. It fell off a trailer when I was going hunting. The next summer, I put another one together. Lo and behold, my nephew found the first one the next hunting season.

"He was hunting the next season and he shot a deer and the deer died in the same coulee that my wheelchair had rolled down into when it fell off the trailer," he said.

"So, (then) I had two. This is where the IM all started," he said. "I have a friend named Mike Stephens who moved here from California four or five years ago. He has been in wheelchair for 40 years. I presented him the second wheelchair that I built and when he first got in it, he smiled from ear to ear. He wheeled around in it like a kid in candy store.

"Mike hunts and he is learning to be a bowhunter. We have had him out quite a bit in the IM."

Since the accident, Young has taken five bucks and two does with a rifle. Two weeks ago, Young shot his first doe out of the wheelchair with his bow and arrow. He has taken plenty of ducks from his wheelchair while hunting Freezout Lake.

The IM is all manual — no electric motors, no batteries.

"Bow hunting takes stealth and quiet; the IM gets me back in there. I never realized I could go elk hunting again and bugle them in. I found some closed roads that are relatively flat. I actually got into a six point bull this year. I didn't get a chance to shoot him but I got into places I never thought I would be able to go again.

"The IM is an off-road wheelchair that does many, many things for disabled. I use mine for mostly hunting and fishing but they have many other applications from carpentry to working around horses.

"It allows you to independently do things — carry equipment — you can carry anything such as tackle boxes, a pitchfork, oats for horses, a fishing pole, put a plant in it and a shovel and go plant something."

Young has built five of the wheelchairs: he says he can build them to fit individuals who may be of different sizes and have different needs.

"It's all about seeing everybody have that smile that Mike Stephens had," Young said.

For the wheelchair frames, Young uses chromium-molybdenum, the same steel that makes bicycle frames light and strong. The IM weighs about 29 pounds.

He made one from titanium and the chrome-moly chairs are almost as light at that. Each chair has Rhino Lining that has a lifetime warranty. Each individual is required to outfit his new chair with his own cushions or pillows in the chair.

Young makes the wheelchairs in his garage. He says it takes him about eight hours to produce one.

"I found that each individual kind of needs their own tweaks so I build them one at a time," he said.

There are other off-road wheelchairs on the market, but Young says nobody can match his price.

Young is a student at MSU-Northern where he is working on a degree in business management with a minor in civil engineering.

He says what he really would like to be is a motivational speaker.

If his enthusiasm is any indication, that goal should be an easy shot for Young.

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