

**CHAMPIONS IN THE AMPUTEE COMMUNITY**  
**SUPPORT GOES BEYOND ORTHOTICS & PROSTHETICS**

**By Tammy L. Boucher**

“One is not born into the world to do everything, but to do something.”  
*Henry David Thoreau – poet, writer, and philosopher*

**GIVING BACK**

KelliAnn Mead’s 6-year-old son Carter is a multiple amputee with all four limbs affected by severe birth defects. Her older son Chase has a pacemaker. This working mom faces odds that most might find insurmountable, yet what does she do? She volunteers her time to help others understand amputations and disabilities.

“Giving back is something that I’ve never really questioned – it’s something that comes naturally,” Mead said. “It not only makes me feel good to help others; it also provides an opportunity to help others become more accepting and friendly towards people like my son who might appear different.”

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Jason Lalla, 41, is an ABC-certified prosthetist with Next Step Orthotics & Prosthetics in Manchester, NH. He is also an above-knee amputee, having lost his leg in a motorcycle accident more than 20 years ago. However, that accident has never stopped him from being an active participant in the community.

Lalla works with cancer patients, diabetics and those who suffered amputation from accidents, whether they are children or the elderly. He visits those facing the choice of amputation in hospitals, showing them that they can go back to doing what they’ve always done – and more.

A Paralympic Gold Medalist and expert skier, Lalla volunteers as a ski coach for Northeast Passage’s Disabled Alpine competition team as well as with the New England Handicapped Sports Association at Mount Sunapee. He actively provides peer counseling to other amputees and is involved with the Wounded Warrior Project.

In addition, Lalla coaches youth lacrosse in Goffstown and teaches kayaking through the New England Sportsmen’s Association. He also volunteers for United We Paddle, an initiative to promote the healing benefits of kayaking.

“One thing I’ve learned over the years is that a disability doesn’t change who you are. It just changes how you do things,” Lalla said. That’s his philosophy – helping people live full lives – and it’s one that he carries into the community on behalf of Next Step.

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Matthew J. Albuquerque, President of Next Step Orthotics & Prosthetics, has always said, “Our success can be found in a collection of our clients’ inspiring stories.” Those stories of amputees achieving and exceeding their goals for physical activity – from walking comfortably to participating in a very active lifestyle – don’t just take place in the confines of medical offices, hidden from public view. They occur out in the community where relationships are formed and where service is offered to those most in need.

Next Step believes in supporting not only its clients but also the community the company calls home, living out the philosophy of corporate citizenship in Manchester, NH, Newton, MA and Warwick, RI. Employees participate in various organizations and activities, including the Amputee Coalition of America, the National Amputee Golf Association, the New England Handicapped Sportsman's Association and the Wounded Warrior Project. Staff members contribute to a whole host of charitable endeavors and hold positions on professional committees associated with advancing the care provided by the orthotic and prosthetic profession.

“It’s not only about clinical experience. It’s about providing the inspiration and courage that will enable people to leave with the tools they need to lead the most fruitful, productive lives possible,” according to Albuquerque. Next Step has come to define its approach to work and life as “e-motion.” Albuquerque expounded, “We understand that to design the right fit you must first understand the person and what they need outside our four walls. That understanding is the first step to a better life.”

## **CAMP NO LIMITS**

Next Step Orthotics & Prosthetics, Inc. prosthetist and below-knee amputee Jerry Scandiffio has volunteered for several years at Camp No Limits (CNL), a non-profit organization providing camps for children with limb loss, along with education, mentorship and support to these children and their families.

With a mission of educating and empowering these young people to discover and develop a healthy, happy and independent lifestyle, Camp No Limits offers a number of daily programs including education, therapy, sports and recreation, creative arts and music. All activities offered incorporate family members as well, in an effort to address the needs of families living with limb loss.

Each day at Camp No Limits begins with Pilates and PT & OT for an hour. After lunch, there are various activities available, ranging from a rock climbing wall, 3- and 4-wheel bikes,

trampolines, tennis and various water activities. Evening activities usually end with a camp fire, toasting marshmallows and making smores – and for Scandiffio, a smile.

“It sounds cliché, but giving back really does feel good. You definitely get more in return than you give,” he said.

According to Scandiffio, a number of the younger campers come with their parents and enjoy a relaxing time on the beach while the kids swim and kayak. There was once a cooking class hosted by renowned triple amputee Cameron Clapp, and Scandiffio was thrilled to be part of it all. In fact, he chose the field of prosthetics because, as an amputee himself, Scandiffio felt he could understand what amputees are going through and be effective in helping them get back to their desired lifestyles.

“Two years ago our family first participated in Camp No Limits,” said Sara McLaughlin, mom of Next Step client Shaun. “We were hesitant to commit and made our final decision when we learned Jerry, Shaun's prosthetist, would be volunteering at the camp. This ended up being a transformative experience for Shaun, as he befriended other children with limb loss, and also challenged himself physically by climbing the rock wall, kayaking and figuring out how to flip on the bungee trampoline.”

“I see being an amputee as challenging, but we all know life is full of challenges,” Scandiffio said. “If I can be a positive influence on another amputee and help change their life, it’s very important for me to do so. That’s why I’m so happy to be a part of Camp No Limits. I’ve found it to be a very inspirational experience, watching so many people helping, caring and getting along together. I would highly recommend CNL, especially to families that have never attended a camp before. It’s a wonderful opportunity to network with other children and parents.”

Camp No Limits usually ends with a talent show, and at this camp, there is certainly no shortage of talent. Those volunteering want to help others live a better life and thereby have a chance to be part of something bigger.

## **AMPSURF**

Surfing is the “King of Sports.” It offers the freedom of the waves, and when provided by AmpSurf, surfing offers an opportunity to be free of disabilities and simply “hang ten.”

“The ocean is such a powerful healing force,” said Next Step Orthotics & Prosthetics’ Certified Practitioner Assistant Ian Gray, who recently became East Coast Regional Director for AmpSurf. AmpSurf is an organization with the goal to promote, inspire, educate and rehabilitate people with disabilities, especially our nation’s veteran heroes, through adaptive surfing and fun and safe outdoor activities. “Just being in the water and having that sense of weightlessness is rehabilitative. It’s very freeing to be riding the waves,” Gray explained.

“AmpSurf was another opportunity for our son Shaun to push his limits and exposed him to a sport that he would not have otherwise done,” said Sara McLaughlin. “We heard about AmpSurf through Ian at Next Step. Shaun had a blast learning to surf with Ian and other employees from Next Step.”

Clinics hosted by AmpSurf are conducted throughout the summer and fall. These clinics include safety instruction, an overview of surfing “lingo,” dry land training and an explanation of equipment before participants take to the water and master the waves.

Gray, who works in Next Step’s Newton, MA office, is a longtime surfer and developed his passion for assisting people with disabilities after being inspired by his mother Judith, who lost her leg 40 years ago in a motorcycle accident. Since then, he has not only honed his skills as a practitioner assistant and prosthetic technician but also pursued and earned certified-instructor status in order to share his love of surfing with those he serves. Gray is also involved with adaptive snowboarding programs.

“I really believe if you want to be happy, you have to give back,” Gray said, “and there are so many ways to give.”

## **CHARITY GOLF**

Justin Laverdiere, a client of Next Step in Rhode Island, passed away in February 2003 after a two-year battle with Osteosarcoma. His short life was filled with challenges to overcome, such as the loss of his leg, and memorable moments that left anyone fortunate enough to know him richer for the experience.

The instant friendship that developed between Justin’s family and the Next Step team still lives on today through the Justin Laverdiere Memorial Golf Tournament. The 10<sup>th</sup> annual memorial golf tournament this past summer raised \$12,800.00, adding to the roughly \$75,000.00 Next Step donated to The Tomorrow Fund in Laverdiere’s memory and keeping hope alive for others who may be struggling.

This tournament is one of many golf endeavors supported by Next Step, which also includes the Veteran’s Count Golf Tournament in New Hampshire. These events are designed to provide more than financial support. They provide personal and community support and a sense of belonging.

“It’s about volunteering and coming together for a good cause,” said Albuquerque. “Active community engagement is the hallmark of what it means to be a quality healthcare provider.”

## **CITIZENSHIP MATTERS**

Giving back matters. Just ask Carter’s mom KelliAnn. With the start of each school year, she visits Carter’s class to discuss appropriate ways to ask about disabilities, which words to avoid

when describing a person who is different and why even facial expressions or stares can hurt someone. She encourages them to go home and share what they learned, and many parents have thanked her for taking the time to talk with the class about disabilities. Now she sees the same children supporting Carter and glowing with pride. They tell her they think Carter is the coolest kid in their school, and one child told Mead that she watches out for Carter on the playground to make sure he isn't being bullied.

“I feel like it's my responsibility to share what I know with others, especially to children who might not ever have encountered someone with a disability,” Mead said. “It's only by giving back and sharing our family's experiences that I feel I'm doing my part to improve this world for my son and those fortunate enough to meet him. Knowledge and mutual respect bring us all together.”

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“Shaun is an active 7 year-old boy. While he is busy keeping up with his friends, he is constantly creating challenges for his prosthetists,” said Shaun's mom Sara. “Next Step has always been great making sure Shaun's prosthesis is not limiting his activities, but I'd have to say that we are even more grateful to the people at Next Step for going above-and-beyond their jobs as prosthetists and giving back through their many community efforts. It's truly made a difference in our lives.”

Matt Albuquerque explained further by saying, “Our expertise and ability to utilize the very latest in technology is obviously important, but we know that being inspiring and compassionate is also necessary to help people get back their desired lifestyles. That's why we call our approach and process 'e-motion.' We combine all the technology that the industry has to offer with precise fitting techniques and a genuine sense of caring and empathy to help change lives.”