



Courtesy of Paul Laincz | Physical therapist assistant Autumn Crane of Mohnton gives support and confidence to Jude Stratton, 76, of Mohnton, a double amputee who enjoys the opportunity to swim at a class at the Heritage of Green Hills, Cumru Township.

Group's safety class gets Berks County amputees in the swim

By Bruce Posten

Tony Petro of Exeter Township believes failure is not an option.

He also won't let an idea sink.

And, he doesn't believe people have to sink in a pool even if they are missing a limb or two.

"I lost my left leg below my knee from diabetes and have been an amputee for about three years, but that doesn't mean I'm just sitting around," said Petro, 67, a retired employee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and founder of a local group called Amputees on the Move.

The organization is only several months old, but already it has had eight to 10 members take the plunge into a pool as part of an amputees swimming safety class at the Heritage of Green Hills, Cumru Township, a continuing care and wellness community.

"The Heritage has bent over backward for us," Petro said. "It has allowed us to use its pool and provide volunteer therapists to get this program started.

"We want to grow as big as we can and show people what amputees can do."

Autumn Crane, 40, of Mohnton, a physical therapist assistant who works at the Heritage with the therapy group Rehab 1, based in Berks and Chester counties, assisted with the swimming class.

"This is a subject close to my heart in getting people to exercise and move, especially those who think they can't," she said.

Crane credited Petro with looking for opportunities for amputees to participate in activities rather than just sit in gatherings more akin to support groups.

"Amputees are willing to try things, but they often need someone in the beginning to give them confidence," she said.

"I'm not one to sit around feeling sorry for myself," said Jude Stratton, 76, of Mohnton, a double amputee who retired after some 50 years in the restaurant business. "I lost my left leg from diabetes in 2006 and my right leg in 2009. I have prosthetics and I keep active and burn calories."

Stratton said the first time she went into the water she was a little scared, but she overcame her fears with the help of a flotation device and another volunteer physical therapist, Matt Musket of Rehab 1.

Crane said the first swimming class included middle-aged and senior adults as well as a 13-year-old who lost a portion of her leg when she was hit by a train.

"I'm also a dancer, and I taught a woman with a walker how to dance," Crane said. "People today want to live life - and that's what this is all about."

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