

Modeling Our Best Work

Four residents in the “Model Cars” day program class recently completed a series of intricate projects after several months of patience, focus and hard work. Harvey Spettel, Jasper Van Veldhuizen, John Klepper and Kirt Moseman spent over 12 hours together carefully assembling hundreds of small pieces to create detailed models. Led by instructors Jerry Shunk and Sandy Pedro, the class challenged these individuals to follow complex instructions and use concentration, problem-solving skills and perseverance. By the end of the quarter, the group had successfully completed three models: a helicopter, a classic car and a car engine. Visitors to campus can view the completed models now proudly displayed in the Wansink Center showcase.



VILLAGE VOICE

VILLAGE NORTHWEST UNLIMITED // Fall 2026



In Loving Memory of Keli King

A resident of VNU for 47 years, Keli was a fixture of the community and one to light up a room with her joyful exuberance. She was caring and interested in people. She loved talking to others, often incorporating laughter, music and singing. Keli passed away on August 14, 2026, reaching the age of 64. This issue of the Village Voice is dedicated to her.



www.villagenorthwest.org

Phone: 712-324-4873



INSIDE THIS EDITION

- Taking a Stand
- Campus Welcomes New Van
- Modeling Our Best Work
- In Memoriam

Taking a Stand: One Young Man’s Push to Stand Up for Himself and Others

A few months ago, Village resident Dakota Caldwell stood in his wheelchair for the first time. After over six years of persistence and his incredible self-advocacy, he was able to purchase a new standing wheelchair for the very first time.

Highly motivated by his desire to stand for the national anthem and during prayers, recitations and the like at church, 25-year-old Caldwell has wanted a standing wheelchair since high school. Having one often equates to being more active in the community and work settings. They assist with bone and muscle health, offer pressure relief and give the chance to be eye level with other people as well.

The Usual Process

In the disability community, it is typical for insurance to cover a new wheelchair once every five years. At VNU, the physical therapy team facilitates this, consulting with Assisted Technology Professionals (ATP) at Numotion, Sanford Health or Avera Health, depending on what the individual or individual’s family chooses. They sit down and talk about how to improve upon the current chair, considering posture, taking measurements and determining what features a new chair should have.

Following that research and preparation, a VNU therapist writes a justification letter or evaluation, which is sent off with a VNU nurse to a face-to-face visit with the individual’s primary doctor. Once the doctor signs off on it and sends in a prescription, it is given to insurance. (continued on next page)



Village Northwest Unlimited
330 Village Circle
Sheldon, IA 51201

Non-Profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Sioux Falls, SD 57104
Permit No. 7972

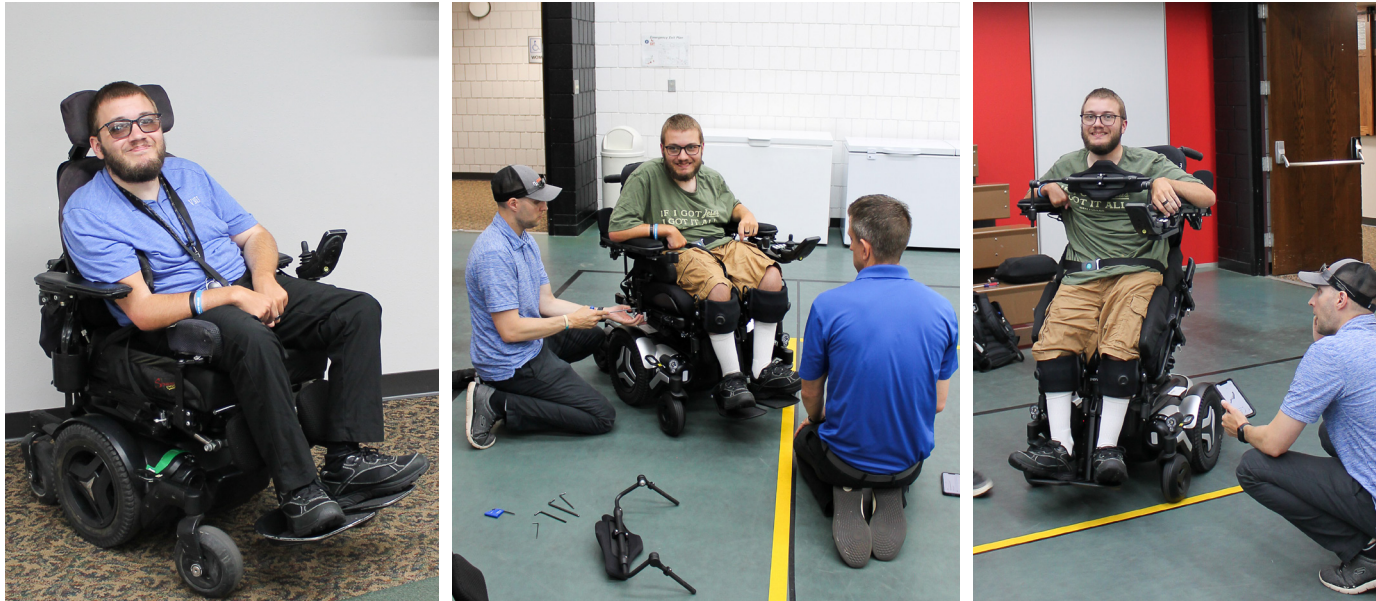
Taking a Stand (continued)

This process takes a few weeks, or even months, to complete. If the prescription is accepted, it is ordered by the ATP and another wait typically ensues. Once the new chair is delivered, it is customized by a VNU therapist and an ATP to suit the individual.

Caldwell's Process

Caldwell's process was different. Although everything requested for his new chair (motor, style, laterals, backrest, cushion, tilt, recline, etc.), was accepted by insurance, the standing feature was not. In fact, it was denied three times. Add to this the fact that Caldwell and his mother attempted obtaining a standing wheelchair over six years ago when he was last due for a new one, and saying he was discouraged is putting it lightly. Consequently, Numotion directed him and VNU to look into the Permobil Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides financial assistance to help pay for wheelchair features not covered by insurance.

Not one to give up easily, Caldwell decided to write a letter asking to be considered by the foundation.



Caldwell in his previous wheelchair (left), being fitted and standing in his new wheelchair (center, right)

With the help of VNU Coordinator of Therapeutic Services, Laura Abels, and Lead Physical Therapist, Nate Huyser, he wrote three drafts before considering it final and sending it off.

Exciting Results

A couple weeks later, they heard back that Permobil would cover the costs. Caldwell tells people that when he found out, he was excited but numb at the same time.

“Out of all the people they could’ve chosen at the time, and I don’t know how many there were, but just to be chosen by them... I was in awe,” he stated.

Caldwell also started a petition called “Wheels of Health in Motion,” advocating for himself and the broader disability community when it comes to insurance coverage for wheelchairs. He recalled times growing up when his mom had to tell him that insurance had denied the equipment he needed. Those experiences have motivated



him to speak up and push for change, in hopes that others won’t have to face the same barriers he has.

Jerry Postma, VNU Director of Admissions, who was updated regularly about the initiative said, “I don’t know that it would have happened without all of his efforts. He is a great self-advocate!”

“Today I stood up and was able to help more in cooking class,” Caldwell says. “And I’m a funeral officiant, so just being able to stand and do public speaking is going to be a whole different level now.”

After more than six years of effort and waiting, Caldwell’s new standing wheelchair arrived on June 30. The chair provides him with the ability to stand independently and includes features designed to support his mobility, positioning and daily activities. What began as a goal to stand during the national anthem and prayers at church, became a reality through the combined efforts of Dakota, Village staff, Numotion and the Permobil Foundation.

Caldwell in his new wheelchair, standing along with others during a recent church service (left)



Campus Welcomes New Van

Thanks to the many generous donations to last year’s annual appeal, the 2005 wheelchair accessible van in the VNU fleet has been replaced. The new 2026 Ford Transit passenger van arrived in August, much to the delight of VNU residents and staff familiar with the old vehicle.