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Hill's progress is slow but steady

By Barb Kromphardt BCR Staff

WYANET -- Liz Kelm wants everyone to know how grateful she is for the concern people have shown her and her family since her son, Dustin Hill, was injured in Iraq earlier this fall.

"I just want people to know how he is doing and how much we appreciate all the cards and gifts that he has received," Kelm said.

Hill, of Wyanet, was seriously injured in a car bombing Sept. 21, while serving with the Galva National Guard unit in Iraq. He suffered the loss of one eye and third-degree burns over about 33 percent of his body. Hill was taken to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, where he has had his right hand, about three inches of his right arm and all of the fingers and thumb of his left hand amputated. He also had his gallbladder removed.

In an e-mail sent to the BCR on Saturday, Kelm said her son stood up for the first time after his gallbladder surgery. She said the surgery set him back, and he basically had to start over again, building his muscles back up.

"With therapy every day, he was getting stronger, but it doesn't take much at all for him to lose all that," she said. "He stood for 30 seconds the first time and then for a minute the second time."

Hill still has a a lot of pain from the incision, when he stands, but Kelm said this will lessen with time.

Hill has already returned to the step-down intensive care unit. Kelm said he only had to stay in the regular ICU after surgery for a couple of days as a precaution.

"He likes it better over there just because he knows all the nurses, which, by the way, most of the nurses here are military males," she said. "They're all very nice and very caring and very good at what they do."

Kelm said all of her son's skin grafts have healed and are doing well, but the new skin and skin grafts are tight and need to be stretched.

"They have been working on the flexibility of his elbows and raising his arms up," she said. "This is also painful for him, but he really works at it."

She said her son does a lot of his range-of-motion exercises while he is sitting in the chair or in the bed.

Kelm said on Saturday the doctors were going to look at his right arm to see if it is ready to start fitting it for a temporary prothesis. She added the doctor had to do a little more surgery a couple of weeks ago to that arm to prepare it for the prothesis.

"This will mean Dusty can start doing little things for himself such as turning the TV on and off, changing the channel and volume as he learns to use it," she said.

Hill's right ear is mostly gone, and Kelm said he may not have hair growth on the top of his head.

"He keeps that shaved anyway, so it doesn't really bother him," she said. "He said it's less to shave."

With all the physical issues he has to deal with, Kelm likes to distract her son however she can.

"The first thing he says to me when I walk in the room is 'Did you bring my shake?'" she said. "I make him a vanilla shake every morning, and once that's gone, he wants me to read the e-mails. On days I don't get e-mails I read the jokes that people send."

If anyone would like to send a card or note to Hill or his mother, it may be sent to the following address: BAMC Mailroom, ATTN: Spc. Dustin Hill, 3851 Roger Brooke Drive, Dept. 1000, Ward 4 South, Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-6200.

E-mails can be sent to Hill at lizzyklpn@yahoo.com.

Vandals trash DePue School District

DEPUE -- A milkman making an early morning delivery Monday to the DePue Unit School discovered a crime scene that closed the school for the day and could amount to tens of thousands of dollars in damaged property.

When the test is the problem

PRINCETON -- It appears Princeton's citywide boil order issued in mid-October could have been the result of testing methods rather than a harmful total coliform in the water.

The cookie lady bakes again

PRINCETON -- As the door opens to Donna Chelin's house in Princeton, the smell of honey, nutmeg and spices rush to your nose. The heat from a hot oven warms your face.

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