

Healthy Lifestyle

Blind skater shows disabled can have active lifestyle, too

■ Steve Coleman

The Mega Steps in Kevin Frost's shoes pretty much sum up the progress the deaf-and-blind athlete has made in the last few months.

The magnetized insoles are just one way the Orléans Usher Syndrome sufferer plans to become a world-class speed skater. The other is through a string of donations people have started giving him since he went public with plans to set foot on the international stage.

"The support has been phenomenal," said Frost. "People have been stopping me on the street and asking what they can do. I walked into one restaurant and they asked me how much money I wanted."

In February, the former hockey referee went public with plans to make the Paralympics. He may be ready before the games are ready for him, however.

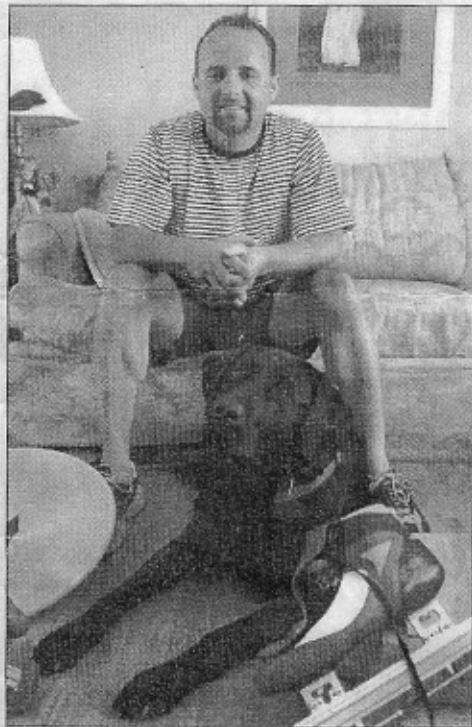
The Paralympics still list only alpine skiing, ice sledge hockey, nordic skiing and wheelchair curling as its winter sports. It's something Frost's supporters are planning to raise with Speedskating Canada this fall.

But after just one winter of learning the ropes, the former hockey referee has dropped 25 pounds of body weight and (unofficially) 28 seconds from his time over 500 metres.

"He's very dedicated," said Ron Guerard, one of the coaches helping with the Orléans resident's training. "All I want out of someone is 110 per cent. He's going to do it. I'd be surprised if there's anyone with a handicap in Canada who can come close to touching him."

Frost will be racing in about half of the races scheduled for this winter. And if there isn't any competition, Guerard, who has hearing problems, said he'll register, strap on his skates and race Frost around the track himself.

But one of their main goals is to get more



Kevin Frost, who plans to become a world-class speed skater even though he is deaf and blind, is getting a lot of local support for his endeavours.

PHOTO BY STEVE COLEMAN

disabled people out of the house and doing something, Guerard says.

The fact that what the Orléans resident is trying to do is so unique has prompted some unique reactions from people in the community, too. Seniors at the Earl Armstrong Arena out for some public skating time last ice season cleared the rink more than once to give Frost room to practice.

And earlier this year, a four-year-old girl pulled a newspaper clipping from *The Weekly Journal* for the skater to autograph.

Training sessions have become a little odd, too. As a way of improving his balance and strengthening his ankles, a box built with on-edge two-by-fours to resemble skate blades has become a regular perch. Another piece of balancing equipment is a rubber ball attached to a wooden platform.

Local service clubs are interested in supporting the skater, while several Orléans businesses have also jumped on the bandwagon with sponsorship money to help him with his training and travel costs.

Frost also plans to take yoga classes to help with his breathing.

While lap times have dropped, there's one important thing the budding speed skater learned this winter, said his coach.

"He learned to have patience," said Guerard. "Speed skating isn't something you're going to learn overnight. When you get it, you're going to feel it."