

A testimony to treatment

ODU Monarch PT patient
steps up in spokesman role

By Irvin B. Harrell

Imagine yourself barely 19 years old, without a care in the world. You're free-climbing with friends at a familiar park in the West Virginia mountains. A consummate adrenaline junkie, you leap from rock to rock like you've done countless times – without any protective gear.

Then in one fell swoop, mortality intervenes. You slip, and find yourself hurtling toward the ground, which is about 10 stories below.

Welcome to Matthew Ewell's world.

"I landed, dying almost instantly from impact, and crushed my C7 vertebrae, causing paralysis," he tells a crowd recently at an Old Dominion University gathering. "I had to be resuscitated twice, flat-lining for roughly seven minutes."

Ewell was initially diagnosed with an unrecoverable incomplete spinal cord injury. He was paralyzed from the chest down. His plans for a career in the military would vanish, and his life would change forever.

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Above: Matthew Ewell uses the REX at ODU Monarch Physical Therapy. **Left:** His repaired C7 vertebrae, which he crushed during his fall.

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COVER STORY

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In the past year, Ewell has become a spokesperson of sorts for ODU Monarch Physical Therapy Clinic. Handsome and well-spoken – sporting a youthful smile – he credits his testimonials to his gratitude for the help and encouragement he has received at the clinic during his rehabilitation from the accident.

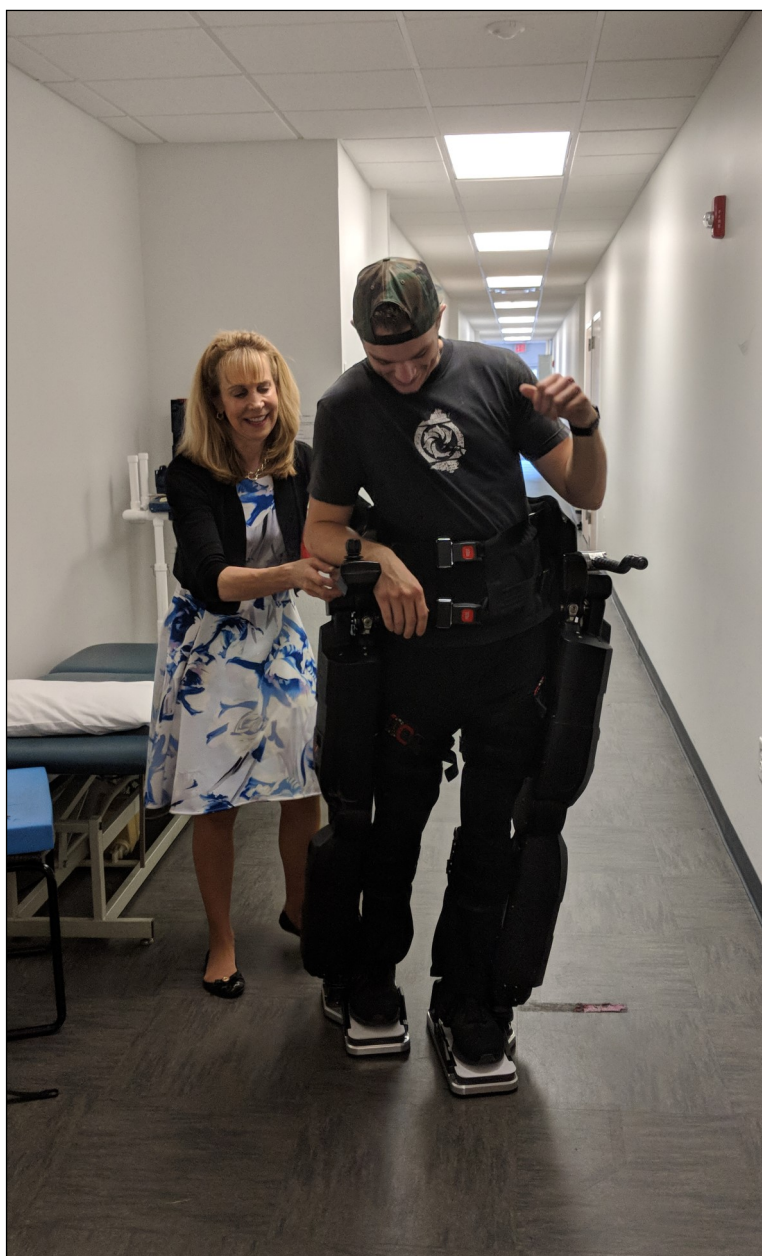
His message is arresting from its opening:

“I would like to thank the university for giving me the honor to speak today on behalf of the College of Health Sciences and ODU Monarch Physical Therapy Clinic. My name is Matthew Ewell. On Sept. 18, 2016, I lost my life.”

Ewell delivers his message while wearing the REX, a high-tech pair of bionic legs that can allow the wearer to experience normal movement patterns, even when a person's muscles can't activate themselves. It is the first commercial powered exoskeleton that can move individuals with complete spinal cord paralysis.

“If nothing else, the device humanizes the individual using it,” he says.

Ewell then takes the audience on his journey to recovery and leaves them awestruck as he closes his presentation by stepping out of the REX and walking without assistance. The crowd responds with a standing ovation.



Matthew Ewell works with Lisa Koperna, director of ODU Monarch Physical Therapy.

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Walking wasn't something that Ewell ever expected to do according to early prognoses. During a week of hospitalization after the accident, he started experiencing movement in his arms, but the pain in his forearms was intense. By the seventh day, he was able to move his right leg.

Despite these physical milestones, after Ewell was transferred to VCU Medical Center Inpatient Rehabilitation, he received news that temporarily tempered his optimism. Mobility tests revealed that there was a 30 percent chance of any mobility on the left side of his body, he says.

"There would be no walking. There would be no running," he says. "There would be a wheelchair. At first, I was crushed. I started losing hope. It tore me to pieces."

But his desire to thrive kicked in, and with it his defiance of his disability.

Ewell went from motorized wheelchair to a regular one, although the pain in his arms persisted. ("It was like a Charley horse that wouldn't go away.") He managed simple movements when possible as he became more acquainted with the wheelchair. But he remained resistant to the thought of relying permanently on the device.

"Having been active all my life – in the Boy Scouts, playing football, baseball, volleyball – my injury was hard to swallow," he says. "It's like being trapped inside a body that doesn't work the way it used to."

Not only had Ewell's physical life crumbled, but with it his social and emotional life as well.

"My girlfriend and I split up. My relationship with my mom and dad fell apart," he says. "I had hit rock bottom."



But Ewell fought on, telling himself, "I can't accept this."

It would take baby steps – literally. Ewell focused on standing. He pushed his therapist to push him. He tried to use muscles that had become dormant. He started standing more, using a walker, and standing in the shower. Before long he was able to do things so many of us take for granted.

"I was able to pee on my own," he says, noting that he and his therapist were brought to tears by the accomplishment.

Soon he was walking with a cane, and in November 2017 he came to Norfolk where he received physical

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therapy at Bon Secours. Still things weren't stable on the financial side, so Ewell found himself couch surfing in Virginia Beach. Two friends in the area, Heather Andrew and Jeremy Douglas, reached out to help him.

"They are the closest to family that I have," he says. "They helped me realize my potential and better control my situation. They helped me get back on my feet."

Ewell continued treatment at Bon Secours for about seven months until landing a job at Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters and working on mobility issues at Southeastern Physical Therapy.

From there, Ewell came to ODU Monarch Physical Therapy to continue his progress. It was there he befriended Dr. Lisa Koperna, the director of the clinic. He refers to her as a therapist and maternal figure, someone who has pushed him and possesses that "never say never" attitude.

"When I met Lisa, I had less muscle control and couldn't properly exercise to build muscle symmetry," Ewell says. "I had bad pelvic issues and way worse balance impairments than now. Lisa helped realign my body so I knew how to walk functionally for the first time."

Ewell is a believer when it comes to ODU Monarch Physical Therapy and the College of Health Sciences, which he says "strives to make such miraculous and almost impossible recoveries (such as his) something within the grasp of every patient that comes through its doors."

And he goes further.

"I plan to use my experience as inspiration to future patients," he said. "My goal now is to design updated versions of the REX for more regular and optimized performance."



Researchers win two governor awards

By Irvin B. Harrell

The Old Dominion University Center for Global Health was named winner of the 2019 Governor's Technology Awards in two categories on Sept. 5 at the Commonwealth of Virginia Innovative Technology Symposium in Richmond.

These prestigious awards honor outstanding achievements and recognize innovative technology initiatives that promote collaboration with the public sector and community outreach. The center's two winning projects featured its collaboration with the ODU School of Community and Environmental Health, the ODU Department of Computer Sciences, and leaders from the Chesapeake Health Department.

"These awards recognize the innovative use of IT to support the unique missions of the local health departments, local public health organizations, and universities," said Michele Kekeh, project leader and the assistant director of Center for Global Health.

"These projects demonstrate the center's commitment to our local communities and these honors will greatly contribute to ODU's goal to build a new School of Public Health," said Dr. Muge Akpinar-Elci, director of the ODU Center for Global Health.

One of projects, "Data Analytics and Technology Help Shape Baby," focused on a nurse case management program (BabyCare) in Chesapeake that provides home visitation and clinical management of high-risk maternity patients and infants over several months to years. The objective of the project was to deliver positive pregnancy outcomes. The Chesapeake Health Department, under the direction of Dr. Nancy Welch, provided the data to the center, which analyzed the data and conducted the research. The results showed that the rates of infant mortality, very



From left: State CIO Nelson Moe; Dr. Nancy Welch, director of the Chesapeake Health Department; Dr. Muge Akpinar-Elci, chair of the ODU School of Community & Environmental Health; ODU researcher Michele Kekeh; ODU researcher My Ngoc Nguyen; Robert Wojtowicz, Dean of the ODU Graduate School; Ajay Gupta, with ODU's Computer Science Department; and Va. Secretary of Administration Dr. Keyanna Conner.

low birth weight, and prematurity were lower in the BabyCare program participants compared to non-participants.

The other winning project, "Technology to Evaluate Service Learning," featured the collaboration of the center with the ODU Department of Computer Sciences and leaders of the Chesapeake Health Department in developing a tool to manage and evaluate the impact of service-learning projects. The project examined the effectiveness of practicum courses and community engagement opportunities by students working with health departments and other community organizations.

"ODU's Center for Global Health is grateful and honored to receive two of ten governor's technology awards for 2019," said Akpinar-Elci.

Wray, Thomas ride off into retirement



Linda Wray, left, who spent 19 years as administrative coordinator for the College of Health Sciences' School of Nursing, retired this past summer. Wray won the Outstanding Staff Member Award in 2013. Betsy Thomas, above, who served as the business manager for the College of Health Sciences, also retired after spending 10 years on the job. Both will be dearly missed.

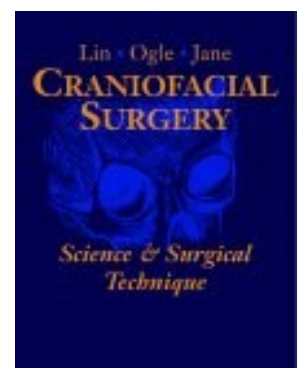
SCHOOL OF MEDICAL DIAGNOSTIC AND TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCES

Ogle's textbook ranks among top in its class

Professor Roy Ogle's textbook "Craniofacial Surgery" has been chosen as one of the top 45 craniofacial surgery texts of all time.

The book covers not only the latest surgical techniques for craniofacial anomalies, but also the basic science – including genetics and molecular biology – behind these anomalies. Most importantly, this resource features a multi-disciplinary approach, with experts in the areas of plastic surgery and neurosurgery collaborating to provide a more complete view of the management of patients with craniofacial anomalies.

Ogle, a 2014 Entsminger Fellow at ODU, collaborated on the book.



Students, faculty, staff get ready, set



Photo from the 2018 Race for the Cure

The School of Dental Hygiene is inviting alumni to join its students, faculty and staff next month for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in Virginia Beach.

The event is held every year along the picturesque oceanfront. This year's event will be on Saturday, Oct. 12. The Old Dominion University School of Dental Hygiene has participated in this event throughout the years in honor of faculty member Sharon Stull.

To register, go to <https://komenceva.org> and opt to sign-up by joining a team. Then select "ODU School of Dental Hygiene." There will be post-race coffee and doughnuts at Duck Donuts 233 Laskin Road (31st Street).

Email Emily Ludwig at eludwig@odu.edu or Ann Bruhn at abruhn@odu.edu to indicate you are attending as an ODU SODH alumni. The runners will convene at 24th Street Park on Atlantic Avenue prior to the race. Look for olive green SODH shirts.



Socializing, gaining insight

College of Health Sciences doctoral students pick the brains of college advisory board members and chairs during a social at La Bella in Norfolk on Sept. 12.



CALENDAR

October 2019

October 5	ODU vs Western Kentucky University, 6 p.m.
October 11-12	Monarch Family Weekend
October 12	ODU @Marshall, Huntington, WV, 2:30 p.m.
October 12-15	Fall Holiday (no classes Saturday-Tuesday)
October 14	Columbus Day
October 18	Fall IPE event, Big Blue Room @The Ted, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
October 19	Rehab Sciences Information Session, HSB 1118, 3:30-5 p.m.
October 21-26	HOMECOMING Week
October 23	Dental Hygiene Advisory Board, HS2114A, 6:30-8 p.m.
October 25	Distinguished Alumni Dinner, Hilton-The Main, invitation only
October 26	ODU vs Florida Atlantic University, 3:30 p.m. Homecoming Game
October 31	COHS Fall Festival, HS grounds, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.