

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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OFFER OF PROSTHESES BRINGS BELIZE MAN TO DALLAS

DALLAS — October 25, 1995 — Adrian Camara was born with no legs, but the efforts of local medical professionals have enabled the 22-year-old Belize native to walk and to stand eye-to-eye with his friends.

"This is a dream come true because I'll be able to do things I've never done before," Camara said earlier this month, while being fitted with two new prostheses by the prosthetics and orthotics clinic at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. Camara previously moved through the streets of his hometown of Orange Walk on a skateboard.

Camara was brought to Dallas through donations to Life Enhancement Association for People (LEAP), a nonprofit organization formed four years ago by Dr. P. Craig Hobar, assistant professor of surgery at UT Southwestern. UT Southwestern faculty members Robert Kistenberg and John Ferguson, instructors in prosthetics and orthotics, donated their time and talent to construct the new legs for Camara.

"Adrian has been physically looked down upon, and he wants to be viewed as an equal in society," Kistenberg said. Camara believes he now will be able to get a driver's license. He has a car that he hopes to have fully modified with hand controls, but the Belize government does not issue driver's licenses to anyone without legs.

Members of LEAP first met Camara earlier this year when several went to Belize to investigate local medical needs and make arrangements for future missions, during which surgeons and other health-care personnel will perform medical procedures unavailable in the Central American nation. When they heard about Camara, they wanted to help him.

"He grabbed our hearts," Hobar said. "We can't help everyone who needs it, but we try to do what we can when we have the chance really to improve someone's life."

Hobar describes Camara as a "highly intelligent" and resourceful young man who managed to overcome obstacles that would have long ago defeated many other individuals. Camara, who speaks English fluently and loves to read, works as a machine operator in one of the largest tortilla factories in Belize.

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As a boy, Camara was given a set of prostheses, but the legs were extremely heavy and he had difficulty walking on them. He eventually went back to his skateboard. Having developed great upper-body strength, Camara can move around quickly and efficiently on the board, but he dreads rainy days and the muddy streets that result.

Camara has managed to make a full life for himself even with his severe disability. His desire for legs, however, was spurred primarily by his wish to look his colleagues and friends in the eye. "Adrian is a very social person, and when he's talking to someone he's always felt that they have to look so far down at him," Hobar said. "He wanted to stand up and talk to them face to face."

The prostheses also will make it easier for him to court and possibly marry in the future, Camara said. "I now will be able to feel confident and walk beside a girl," he said.

Camara arrived in Dallas through arrangements made by LEAP mission coordinator Robbie Jackson in late September and will remain in town for a month. After taking the necessary measurements and creating the prostheses, the prosthetists will work with Camara to make sure that the adaptation to the new legs goes smoothly.

LEAP volunteers have focused their efforts previously in the Dominican Republic. Hobar and other plastic surgeons have gone to the island nation annually. They turned their attention to Central America after a resident of Belize pointed out that his country has no plastic surgery specialists and that many people could benefit greatly from the medical expertise available through LEAP. Volunteers, including Hobar, will visit again in November.

Among others aiding Camara are Continental Airlines, which provided his plane tickets, and Fit for Life fitness center in Fort Worth.

LEAP is an organization including plastic surgeons, nurses, anesthesiologists and nonmedical personnel who assist with life-changing reconstructive surgeries such as cleft lip and palate corrections. Children with tumors and traumatic facial injuries also are treated free of charge.

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