

# THE FREE PRESS

Kinston, North Carolina

## Stroke victim relates recovery in book

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BY Mary Ellison Turner Community News Editor

Robert Smith knows first-hand how debilitating a stroke can be. The Walstonburg native who adopted Kinston as his home 39 years ago, suffered a stroke in 1990. In a coma for two months at Lenoir Memorial Hospital, Smith spent six weeks in rehabilitation therapy in Greenville and the last 14 years rebuilding his life.

"It was very frustrating," he said. "I had to learn to do everything. I couldn't talk, walk, use either arm or hand, and I couldn't eat. My brain was about the only thing working." To share his experience with others, he has chronicled a personal account titled, "The Stroke of Midnight." He will sign copies of his book from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday at the Book Depot, next to the Belk Store at Vernon Park Mall.

Smith came to Kinston when he transferred from the JCPenney store in Greenville to open the Vernon Park Mall store as publicity/advertising manager. He also taught engineering technology at Lenoir Community College. Smith now designs houses on his computer, which he added humorously, "has not asked me yet if I am disabled."

Throughout his rehabilitation, his speech therapist, Susan Wagner, encouraged him to write a book about his experiences. "That was the turning point," he said. AuthorHouse just published the volume Smith started about six years ago.

"If I can help one person prevent having a stroke, or bring comfort and support to someone who has, I will have accomplished my goal," he said. "I don't want any of the money from the sales. It all will go to my church, Howell Swamp Free Will Baptist Church in Walstonburg.

The book is dedicated to the late Cleve Wilkie, a minister and writer who was Smith's best friend and a father figure. Wilkie was influential in Smith's life and set the example for his writing.

"He always told me to write about what I know and to write as if I am talking to the reader," Smith said. "I hope I have done him justice."

Rehab nurse, Marie Welch, also oversees a monthly stroke support group that continues to provide opportunities for Smith to encourage and be encouraged.

He learned about the SaebFlex, the new treatment for stroke victims that improves range of arm motion, strength and control. Originally called the FTM (for functional tone management), the therapy product was renamed to honor the inventor's grandmother.

"I've been using it for 10 weeks, and the difference is absolutely amazing," Smith said. "Before I started used the SaebFlex, I couldn't raise my left arm. Now, if I really concentrate on it, I can hold a cup of coffee, lift it to my mouth and drink."

Smith has two sons - Lin Smith of Raleigh, 37, a mechanical engineer at the Research Triangle Park; and Gray Smith of Greenville, 28, an electrical designer. "We're very close," Smith said.

The print-on-demand book is available for \$12.95 through the Book Depot at Vernon Park Mall, Barnes and Noble in Greenville, Janice's Country Kitchen in Walstonburg or by calling the author at (252) 747-4565.