

# Never Give Up Injury Opens New Doors For Young Entrepreneur

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After suffering a broken neck in 1988 at the age of 25, Steve White of Russellville, Tennessee, knew his life was changed forever.

The accident occurred as White, standing on an extension ladder, was painting the roof of a trailer on a Saturday afternoon in October in this rural Hamblen County community. The ladder began to slide as the young man tried to reach too far with the paintbrush. Realizing what was happening, he quickly tried to jump, but his feet got caught in the ladder, forcing him to take the 8-foot fall on his head.

Following months of rehabilitation, White returned home. No longer able to walk and with only limited use of his hands, he liked to spend time watching his mother, Imogene, and her friend, Mary Dalton, cook apple butter in a big brass kettle.

That's when Steve White's entrepreneurial spirit kicked in. "I love the taste of the apple butter and thought it could be made on a larger scale and sold in local stores," he said. "We had all the apples we needed and the old family recipe; I just had to get the right people to make it," he said, referring to his mother and her friend who agreed to convert their lifelong hobby into a business. With that, White's Old Fashioned Apple Butter, Inc. was born 18 months ago, and Steve White serves as its president.

The apples come from the White's orchard, some 40 acres dotted with around 3,000 trees, mostly Red and Golden Delicious, Winesap, and Red Rome. White's father, the Rev. Buddy White, started the orchard in 1977, in addition to pastoring the nearby Cedar Creek Baptist Church.

In running his operation, White utilizes a custom van with a lift to make deliveries. He also has a voice-activated computer, which he uses for record keeping and word processing. Both were obtained through assistance from the local state Vocational Rehabilitation Office and the Small Business Administration. He has recently approached Tennessee's AgrAbility Project, a joint effort with the Easter Seal Society of Tennessee, Inc., for assistance, after being referred by Jim Bond, Extension leader in Hamblen County.

Says Tim Prather, UT Extension safety specialist, "In the AgrAbility Project, we work primarily as case managers. We do site visits, determine what the clients' needs and desires are and develop a plan that will help them work more efficiently. We accomplish this by coordinating services with various agencies to acquire funding for initiatives that will make farmers and farm workers more productive. We also offer peer support," Prather continued. "Being a friend and letting our AgrAbility clients know that they're not the only ones in that situation is sometimes just as important as the service itself," he added.

White is looking to the Tennessee AgrAbility Project for assistance in extending his mobility beyond his motorized wheelchair. "We'd like some help in making modifications to my van so that I could eventually drive it myself," he revealed. "And I'd like to get the lawn mower retrofitted so that I could start mowin' a~ain."

The Whites are also working with UT entomologists in trying to control insect problems in the orchard. Dr. Charles Pless and Dr. Dennis Deyton have been experimenting with a soybean oil that appears to have great promise for controlling San Jose scale, terrapin scale, and mites, say the Whites.

Nowadays Little Mountain Apple Butter & Jellies are sold in nearly 100 retail stores, mostly in Knox, Hamblen, and Sevier counties. "We are at the point where we want to grow, but not so much that we can't supply our current customers," says White. Thus far, the enterprising young businessman has not tried to place his products with the large supermarket chains. "We are satisfied to be growing at a good, steady pace. I would rather do that than overstep my boundaries and not be able to meet the demand that wholesaling to a large chain might require."



*White uses a voice-activated computer to do correspondence and recordkeeping activities related to the business.*

Besides wholeselling, White operates a retail outlet next to the orchard, located off Little Mountain Road. In addition to the apple butter and various jellies packaged attractively in baskets and boxes, the family sells fresh apples, peaches, plums, and apricots in season. School children also frequently tour the orchard, returning home with delectable samples of fresh fruit and a lesson from Rev. White about how apples grow.

Being physically challenged has no doubt closed some doors for Steve White, but it has opened new doors as well. "I've always said you just have to take what you have and do the best you can with it and go on. Everybody has their ups and downs. I have a very supportive family, and I try to be optimistic," he continued. "I see the doughnut, whereas the pessimist sees the hole."