

SATURDAY
March 1, 2003

Grand Haven 53
Mona Shores 50
Spring Lake 56
Ludington 44
Fruitport 63
Orchard View 58

Grand Haven TRIBUNE

Today's
forecast
Cloudy,
low 30s
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50°

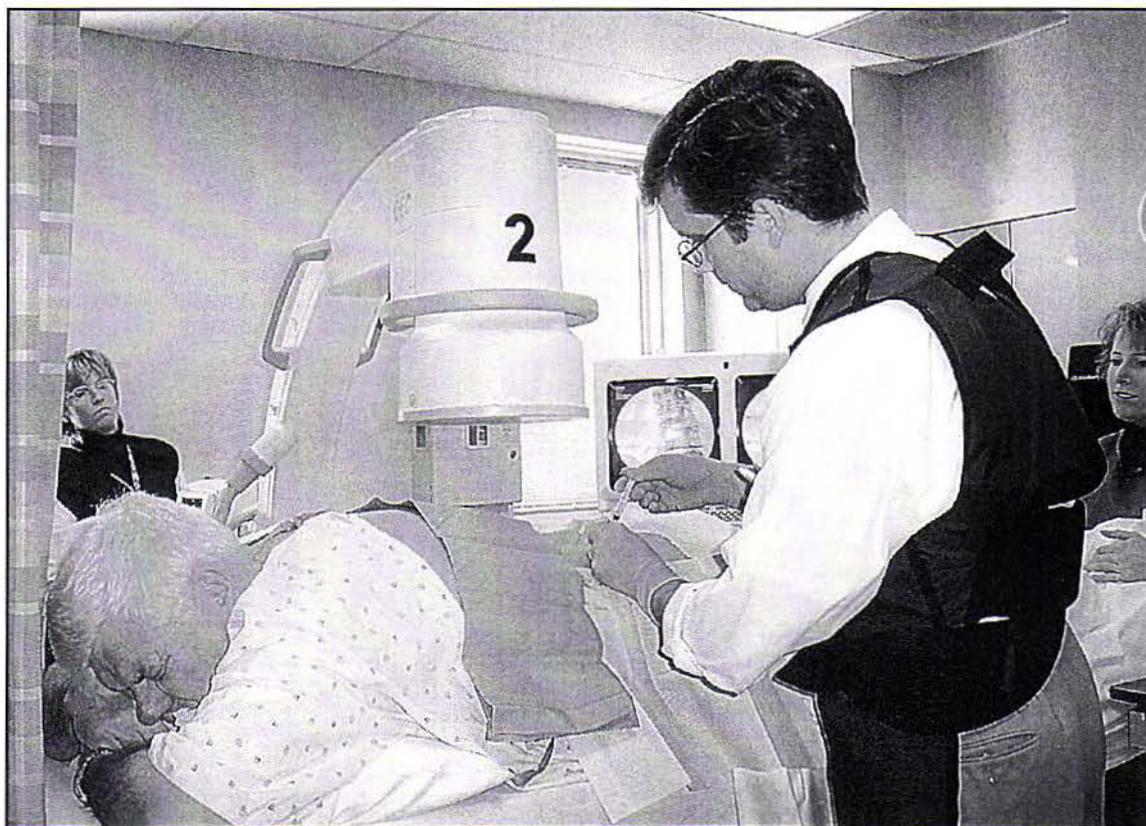
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Man crippled by back pain getting his life back

'Just fine'

Dr. Joe Vanden Bosch M.D. of Michigan Pain Consultants gives retired Grand Haven Township firefighters and fire chief, Terry French, a nerve-block injection at North Ottawa Community Hospital to manage the pain in his lower back.

Tribune Photo/Kyle Moroney



BY KYLE MORONEY

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Terry French has tolerated varying degrees of bodily aches and pains. In recent years, however, the retired Grand Haven Township firefighter and fire chief has experienced an excruciating pain that had him "living in

his recliner" for about 1 1/2 months.

Thanks to a growing demand for pain clinics, French, 59, is now able to manage the ache in his lower back, left hip and knee, and enjoy life, instead of being left practically immobile with the unbearable pain.

Dr. Joe Vanden Bosch, one of

nine board-certified anesthesiologists at **Michigan Pain Consultants** and one of two doctors at its Grand Haven location, understands the type of constant pain French has and is helping him to control the pain at North Ottawa Community Hospital.

"He's had back pain for a number of years. I'd say about

eight years on and off," French's wife, Sylvia French, 60, said. "He couldn't lay flat or on his side. A haven of comfort to him was sitting in the black leather chair. He was in (the reclining chair) 80 percent of the time — he slept in it and sat in it. But he

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Pain

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couldn't walk because of the excruciating pain."

Prior to going to MPC and on the recommendation of his primary care physician, Terry French underwent two six-week physical therapy sessions in October and December 2002 at NOCH.

"I went to therapy for six weeks before I came here (MPC), and it didn't seem to be doing anything," Terry French said. "So I went back to (my primary care physician) and he recommended that I come and see Dr. Vanden Bosch."

"With patients, before they come see me, they usually go through therapy. But because of the pain, they just don't tolerate the therapy very well. They have difficulty doing the exercises, and they don't get much benefit out of it," Vanden Bosch said. "So what we do to get this pain under a little bit better control is we give them a window of opportunity that sometimes gets them back into therapy and then work on stretching and strengthening the muscles in the back and abdomen and give them some tools that they can use at home through home exercise to keep the pain under control."

Vanden Bosch said a very common story that he hears from patients is that they receive therapy and cannot complete it.

"It's because they need to get their pain under better control before they look at doing more reconditioning," he said.

According to Vanden Bosch, Terry French has two degenerative discs in his lower lumbar spine, along with arthritis in the joints in the back. He said the discs, one of which is a bit herniated, have thinned out and are bulging back, which causes the narrowing of bone tunnels that touch the nerves.

"On a scale of one to 10, with 10 as extremely painful, I had a 10 — all the time," the 32-year firefighter veteran said. "I've felt nothing like this. It was just out-of-this-world."

French, who spent 20 years with Department of Natural Resources and fighting fires all over the state, said he tolerated all sorts of lifting pains associated with firefighting, aches he'd get from performing extrication related to car accidents, and possibly arthritis.

But the pain he has felt recently doesn't compare to those minor aches that afflicted him before.

"Every day, life was lousy. It was terrible," he said, noting that prior to experiencing this pain, he was capable of driving his farm tractor and cutting and splitting wood.

"When I woke up with this aggravated pain, I slept on the floor; I slept in the recliner."

"No, he lived in the recliner," Sylvia French interjected.



Tribune Photo/Kyle Moroney

Grand Haven resident Terry French and Dr. Joe Vanden Bosch M.D. of Michigan Pain Consultants discuss how the nerve-block medication will help reduce his lower back pain.

"Yeah, I lived in the recliner," French acknowledged.

Sylvia said that her husband's level of pain did not just affect him, but it affected her daily life as well.

"It isn't easy to leave somebody (for work or daily errands) that's in chronic pain and is in a chair and doesn't move night or day — other than I come home to find him in the same position that I left him with phone in hand just in case he needs you."

Vanden Bosch said upon a patient's first initial visit, the 13 MPC pain clinics in Southwest Michigan take a look at how the pain affects the patient's, as well as his family's daily lifestyle.

"When we see patients, we're kind of in the stabilization phase of the pain. So we need to make a diagnosis as to what is causing the pain and also see how it's affecting the patient's quality of life," he said. "We find out what's causing the pain, and we develop the right treatments to help localize the pain and help get it under better control."

In order to soothe French's agony, Vanden Bosch uses different nerve-block techniques where medication is injected around the nerves and spine that may be causing the irritated pain.

"Then we move into the maintenance phase to keep the pain under control," he said. "So he may need a treatment, once things are under control, every month or so to keep the pain under control. And we also bring in other disciplines, like physical therapy, often times."

Michigan Pain Consultants, which was

founded in 1984 by doctors Mark Gostine and Fred Davis, has 13 locations, including Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Allegan and Holland. The Grand Haven location at NOCH opened in the summer of 2001.

"Our philosophy here at **Michigan Pain Consultants** is to provide a community-based resource for patients to make it easy for them," Vanden Bosch said. "We provide easy access to pain care and state-of-the-art technology, and there are procedures here that we can offer other patients in the Grand Haven community."

According to Vanden Bosch, 4 billion work days are lost annually to chronic pain.

"Chronic pain is a major health problem. And it's only going to increase with the growing elderly and growing age in demographics — all the baby boomers are coming up," he said. "A lot of people are working longer into their lives now. And because of that, the spine is getting more degenerated and is more prone to injury the older you work. So these are reasons to keep the pain under control — to keep people working and functioning."

After receiving a shot in his lower back during the first session with Vanden Bosch, Terry French said he could instantly feel the medication at work. And Sylvia French was stunned that it was the same man she married 40 years ago.

"He gave me the first shot and I walked just fine — no pain. What you did in there made me feel 100 percent better," he said as he shook Vanden Bosch's hand and walked out of the hospital — "just fine."