

Computers offer communication for stroke, brain injury survivors

by Janet Rathner
Staff Writer

More than three years after a stroke impaired his speech and ability to converse, Dick Van Brunt is reading, shopping, paying the family bills and communicating, all thanks to a speech therapy that incorporates his home computer.

The program helping the Gaithersburg resident reclaim his independence is called Innovative Speech Therapy. It's the brainchild of Joan Green, 36, a speech language pathologist living in Potomac. Since 1993, Green and her staff of four have been bringing this unique approach to homes of stroke patients and people dealing with head injuries and the initial stages of Alzheimer's disease.

"We teach clients how to use



Joan Green (left) talks with stroke patient Dick Van Brunt at his Gaithersburg home. Donna Ika, Van Brunt's wife, watches in the background.

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Green, explaining how clients can take what they learn and go home and work independently "on practice on your own... hours and hours... and then the therapist can come back and adjust the therapy."

Van Brunt's stroke left the 59-year-old research physicist with aphasia, a communication disorder resulting from brain damage that affects his speech and his ability to understand other people speaking.

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misses benefits of the speech-language therapy.

"You hear the word, you read the word, you're shown a picture, and it gives you immediate feedback," repeat it.

Donna Ika, Van Brunt's wife, said Innovative Speech Therapy has made a huge difference in both their lives.

"He was angry. He couldn't be left alone. He said, 'I want to die,'" said Ika.

To learn more

For information about Innovative Speech Therapy's individual and group sessions, call 301-602-2889. The Montgomery County Stroke Club can be reached at 301-681-8272 or at MCStroke@aol.com.

said Ika, 59, senior collections officer for a credit union, recalling her husband's first sentence four months after the stroke. "This has opened a new world for him."

David Kinselman, president of the Montgomery County Stroke Club, a support group for stroke survivors, family members and caregivers, said the club has offered its own computer literacy assistance classes when funding has been available, and he supports Green's work.

Kinselman said he believes com-

puter literacy is an important skill for stroke survivors, but they're doing a great job in getting the survivors back to where he can command- cate."

GAZETTE COMMUNITY NEWS

March 15, 2000

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Photograph by Galen A. Lentz