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BROM HOBAN | CENTRAL TEXAS RUNNING

He keeps injured athletes moving

Prosthetist Kimbell has helped many return to track, road

Hit the trails around Lady Bird Lake on an average weekend and you will pass, and be passed by, runners of all ages and from all walks of life.

Take Kevin Kimbell, for example.

Kimbell is 35, married and has a 2-year old son. He trains 50 miles a week, runs 5Ks in the 16-minute range, plans to run the 3M Half Marathon in January, and enjoys a reputation as a top runner in this area.

Kimbell is a prosthetist for Orthotic & Prosthetic Technologies in Round Rock. He says he is "someone who helps design and fit prostheses for people who have lost limbs, whether due to disease, traumatic accidents, or wounds incurred during military service."

A track and cross country runner for the University of Texas, Kimbell was pursuing a civil engineering degree when, after a spring workout in 1997, he noticed a group of paralympians practicing on the track. These amputee athletes had come to Austin specifically to train in events ranging from 100-meter sprints to the mile.

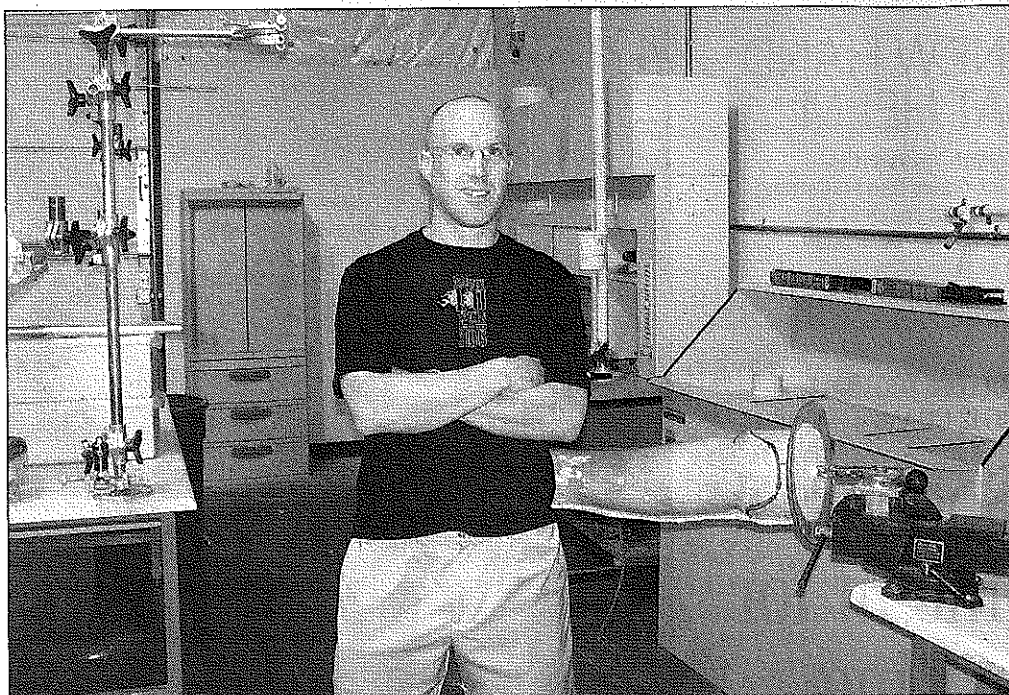
He was intrigued.

"At that time, they were using early versions of what we now call the 'Flex-Run' foot," says Kimbell. "It's a type of carbon fiber spring — a prosthetic limb specifically designed for running."

Kimbell says he realized he was looking at engineering of the most elegant kind. Twenty hours short of a degree, he dropped civil engineering and switched majors.

"I found out I'd need kinesiology and biology to get into the prosthetics field. It was a big career turn," says Kimbell.

After graduating from UT



Brom Hoban

Kevin Kimbell, a former University of Texas track and cross country athlete, took an interest in prosthetics while watching a group of paralympians work out at the UT track in the spring of 1997.

in 1999, Kimbell interned as a prosthetic technician at a company in San Antonio, then spent two more years at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas in its Prosthetics-Orthotics program.

Kimbell focuses primarily on prosthetics and says, "The field combines everything I like — working with my hands, working with athletes and setting up people with cycling and running legs. Being a runner helps me analyze the biomechanics of people who have lost one or both legs and want to be able to run or bike."

"It's not the end of the world," he says. "Military funding in recent years has really led to an increased variety of choices. You've got shock absorbers, battery-powered mechanical feet and hands. They've really come a long way with hands."

"Everything is myoelectric now — using the remaining muscle signals to make hands open, close and flex. The field

has changed tremendously since I first started, not only for athletes, but for non-athletes as well."

Kimbell says he recently was able to help Gay Henry, who is 69 and a resident of Proctor, southwest of Stephenville. Henry was severely injured when a carport collapsed on her. She later had her left leg amputated below the knee.

Kimbell first fitted her for a regular prosthetic leg. Then, three months ago, she asked if he would fit her with a prosthetic leg that would allow her to run.

"I had been a runner for 30 years," says Henry. "I wanted to still be able to do it."

"When the spring leg was ready, I tried it and was able to run up and down the sidewalk. When I got home, I ran four miles the first day. Now I run five miles a day. When I run, I can hardly tell it's there. It never hurts. It's been the greatest blessing to be able to run again. Kevin is good at

Upcoming races

Friday

■ McDonald's Lights of Love 5K, 5 p.m. at Mueller Hangar, Austin. See www.runtex.com/events.

Saturday

■ Spicewood Vineyards 1/2 Marathon and 10K, 8:30 a.m. at Spicewood Vineyards, Spicewood. See www.runintexas.com.

■ Run Pfor Your Life Pflugerville 5K, 9 a.m. at Lake Pflugerville. See www.runtex.com/events.

what he does."

"I've fitted a fair amount of athletes," says Kimbell. "With young people, you kind of expect success. Kids lose their legs, and they do extremely well. Older folks, you just don't know."

"But Gay really amazed me. I'd say she was one of my biggest success stories."