

Repair shop integral part of competition at Paralympics

By Kim Tong-Hyung
The Associated Press

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — Away from the stadiums, it's the most hectic place at the Paralympic Games — a white warehouse on a corner of PyeongChang's athletes' village, where a team of technicians hustle around the clock to carve, weld, and sew items near piles of bionic hands, feet, and knees.

There are also stacked boxes of jumbled wheelchair parts and several huge machines used to repair the equipment that brought hundreds of disabled athletes from around the world to the sleepy ski resort town in South Korea's rural east.

Here, a team of 23 international specialists employed by Germany's Ottobock are asked to fix anything and everything — from broken wheelchairs and prosthetic limbs to hockey sleds and sit-skis in need of repair.

The unpredictable and pressure-filled job highlights the vital role of devices at the highest level of disabled sports.

"At the moment, it's absolutely quiet, but you never know," said Peter Franzel, a director at Ottobock, during what he said was a relatively calm morning at the repair shop in PyeongChang. "In two minutes, the door opens and 10 athletes come in with a problem and we're suddenly very, very busy."

Franzel spoke as a pair of technicians hammered, stretched, and sawed off the ski poles of a Swiss athlete who wanted them shortened. Others worked to fix a pair of wheelchair tires and frames.

Ottobock, which has provided exclusive and free repair services to Paralympic athletes since the 1988 Seoul Games, brought more than 8,000 spare parts to South Korea's second Paralympic Games in 30 years, including wheelchair components, artificial limbs, knee joints, leather, and rubber crutches.

That didn't include the thousands of nuts and bolts, many boxes of glue and tape, and a variety of machines for sewing, carving, and welding sports equipment

Xi reappointed as China's president with no term limits

By Christopher Bodeen
The Associated Press

BEIJING — China's rubber-stamp legislature has unanimously approved the reappointment of Xi Jinping as president with no limit on the number of terms he can serve.

The National People's Congress also appointed close Xi ally Wang Qishan to the formerly ceremonial post of vice president.

At the Great Hall of the People, Xi, Wang, and other officials took turns stepping to the lectern to place their left hands on the constitution and raise their right fists as they delivered an oath swearing loyalty to the constitution, the motherland, and the people.

All 2,970 members of the National People's Congress in attendance approved Xi's reappointment, while Wang received just one vote against.

Xi, who leads the ruling 90-million-member Communist Party, was also reappointed as head of the government commission that commands the military. He is already head of an identical party body overseeing the 2-million-member force.

Xi, 64, is considered the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong. He was recently given the right to continue in office indefinitely after the legislature scrapped term limits for the president and vice president.

Chinese officials defended the move, saying it would bring the presidency in line with Xi's other two main positions of head of the party and commander of the armed forces.



and prosthetic limbs. There's also a high-tech system made of computers, cameras, and laser equipment for measuring the balance and fit of the repaired devices.

Ottobock's technicians had handled more than 300 repairs in less than a week at the Paralympic Games, said spokeswoman Merle Florstedt.

In addition to the 3,200-square-foot main repair office at the athletes' village, Ottobock also operates smaller repair shops at PyeongChang's alpine skiing and biathlon venues and the hockey arena at nearby Gangneung.

The technicians at PyeongChang came from nine countries, including the United States, Germany, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, Japan, and China. Translators hired by teams and a translation app on smartphones further assisted communication between technicians and athletes.

"We do have to be very creative in how we find solutions for these patients because with so many different parts and pieces, we have to be very inventive on what we are going to do," said John Spillar, one of Ottobock's American specialists who previously worked at the Parapan American Games and Invictus Games.

About 60 to 70 percent of the repairs had been wheelchairs, simply because so many

of the 670 athletes at PyeongChang rely on them, said Franzel.

"Everyone is pin trading here," he said. "We see some flat tires because of (dropped) pins."

Some jobs are easier than others. The first repair job at PyeongChang was super-gluing the broken frame of the glasses an athlete had dropped, Franzel said. Canada's chef de mission, Todd Nicholson, wanted the length of his parka trimmed before the opening ceremony. A Polish athlete asked technicians to fix a broken wheel on his luggage bag.

The more complex repairs come from sports like fast and physical sled ice hockey games where players with lower limb impairments fly around the ice on lightweight aluminum sleds while banging into each other at high speeds.

Spillar fixed a broken sled nose for an Italian hockey player who had temporarily come out of the team's 2-0 win over Sweden to switch to a back-up sled. Spillar said he had to re-weld both sides of the device, create a new pipe, and attach additional struts to strengthen rigidity.

During the same game, Swedish forward Maximilian Gyllsten, who had his right leg amputated below the knee

FIX-IT FOLKS. John Spillar, one of Ottobock's American specialists who previously worked at the Parapan American Games and the Invictus Games, works at PyeongChang's athletes' village in Pyeong-Chang, South Korea. In a white warehouse, a team of technicians hustled around the clock to carve, weld, and sew ripped items near piles of hands, feet, and bionic knees. The specialists were asked to fix anything and everything — from broken wheelchairs and prosthetic limbs to hockey sleds and sit-skis in need of repair. (AP Photo/Kim Tong-hyung)

following a 2013 car accident, injured his left leg and later came to the repair shop asking for a protective covering that would help him play through pain.

The most difficult challenge so far has been the case of Croatian cross-country skier Josip Zima, who came to the repair shop angry and fearful that he might not be able to compete at the games at all. His team had sent Zima the wrong sit-ski to PyeongChang and there was no way he could fit into a much smaller device that originally belonged to a female teammate.

"We were going to do everything that we could to get him out there on the field," Spillar said.

It took five technicians about eight hours to completely take the device apart and create an entirely new one that Zima could compete in. Metal bars and tubing were welded into the frame to expand the device. The technicians also had to realign the entire chair so that it could support the heavier Zima, which required installing additional struts and supports. Zima "jumped" on his new sit-ski the next day and was "so happy," according to Franzel.

But some repair jobs end with smiles; others don't.

The new leg shelter allowed Gyllsten, the Swedish hockey player, to play in the team's next game against Norway — and he scored Sweden's only goal in a 1-3 loss.

Things didn't end as well for Zima. His new device broke apart during the men's 1.1-kilometer sprint at PyeongChang's Alpensia Biathlon Center. Zima improvised and finished the race but came in last among the 35 athletes who completed the race.

2017 Most Honored Elder Award Recipient Christine Chin Ryan

Christine Chin Ryan was born in Trinidad and Tobago to Alexander and Ann Chin, their fifth of six children. Her parents had immigrated to Trinidad and Tobago from China and in 1966, the family immigrated to New York City when the U.S. increased the number of immigrants allowed from certain countries, including those in the Caribbean. Christine married her husband, Patrick Ryan, in 1979. They have lived in Oregon for nearly 40 years. Christine has run a small business in the technology industry for 30 years. She is a passionate advocate for small businesses and is also very active in politics. Among her many activities, she is an ambassador for the Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce (APACC) of Oregon and Southwest Washington and a member of the City of Portland's Small Business Minority Evaluator Program (MEP); moderated candidate forums for the Villages at Mount Hood for the past six years; served as a state organizer for the Women's March on Washington in Oregon in January of 2017; volunteered for the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton; served as secretary for the AAPI Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon (DPO) and treasurer of the DPO Environmental Caucus; and more.



The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2018 "Most Honored Elder" awards.

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 26, 2018 at southeast Portland's Wong's King Seafood Restaurant. Nomination forms and guidelines for eligibility are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is
Wednesday, April 4, 2018 at 5:00pm.

The Asian Reporter Foundation's 20th Annual Scholarship & Awards Banquet features:	
Most Honored Elder Awards	Cultural entertainment
Exemplary Community Volunteer Awards	Ethnic dinner
College Scholarship Awards	Silent auction