

## Sean Kent

Sean Kent hasn't let a broken neck slow him down. After moving to Arkansas he created an adaptive sports organization for those in similar circumstances.



APRIL ROBERTSON  
NWA DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Imagine if you had to invest \$3,500 to begin playing basketball or \$21,000 to start mountain biking. Would you still be all in to play or hit the trail?

That's a choice Sean Kent made, but he knows that it's not an easy decision for the average person. That's part of why he started the Ozark Adaptive Sports Association in spring 2021 — to give other people with physical disabilities the opportunity to try equipment that's often exorbitantly priced and not covered by insurance.

After sustaining a spinal cord injury in 2011, Kent found that playing sports with others was still one of the best, most fun ways to connect and find community.

"Doing it is better than [being in] support groups," he says. But moving from Chicago to Northwest Arkansas in 2018 meant quite the commute if he was going to continue playing wheelchair rugby or basketball. "Before we formed a group here, the closest team was in Kansas City, and driving to practice was tedious."

Arkansas was not without need for its own adaptive sports organization. One in every three Arkansans has a mental, medical or physical disability, or roughly 822,145 in total, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And more than 455 Arkansans have spinal cord injuries. That number doesn't include people who are working, or amputees, Kent says, or those who have similar injuries who live in neighboring regions like northeast Oklahoma and southwest Missouri.

"There was no wheelchair rugby here," says Danelle Vanderkoon, Kent's sister, noting that it meant an eight-hour drive for him and their dad to attend weekly practice. "It wasn't so much that he didn't mind the drive, it was that there were others in this area that don't have that opportunity. ... For Northwest Arkansas to be so active and have so much to do around here, it was disheartening on some level."

So far, Kent's Ozark Adaptive Sports Association meets every Wednesday for group sports like wheelchair rugby and basketball, and once a month, on the third Saturday, they go hand cycling together in cooperation with Achilles International Running Group. Achilles initially focused on fitness opportunities for people with developmental disabilities but has since branched out to include those with physical disabilities.

When Kent told his buddy Rob Santangelo about the group he wanted to create, "I said, 'if there's anybody who can get it done, it's you,'" Santangelo says. "I'm so proud of Sean to overcome his disability that was put on him and create something like this; it ... will change a lot of people's lives."

Santangelo works for an insurance company. He's acutely aware that most plans are "stingy" about things designed for recreation but disagrees that it should be categorized as such.

"It's part of the overall mental stability for someone with that disposition," he

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"[Wheelchair rugby] got people out of their houses, not wallowing like their life is over. We get them out, get more confident, and they go back to school or find new work. In a sports chair, you feel more free."

(NWA Democrat-Gazette/Charlie Kaijo)

## Pair create CF institution to fight for Black patients

ERIC E. HARRISON  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Terry Wright was 54 when he was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. But he had known for a long, long time that he was suffering from *something*.

"All my life, from when I was a toddler to now," he says, "waking up, even today, feeling something was wrong."

It wasn't like he didn't try to figure it out. "I visited an array of doctors," he says. Diagnoses ranged from chronic pancreatitis and pneumonia to allergies, ulcers and hepatitis.

Cystic fibrosis is a genetic disease that affects the lungs and digestive system, so any and all of the symptoms Wright was experiencing would be part and parcel of what was afflicting him.

In fact, one doctor told him several years ago, "If you were not Black, I would say you had cystic fibrosis."

The diagnosis problem stemmed largely from a long-term misapprehension, says Bethany Howell, senior development director of the Arkansas-West Tennessee Chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

"It was thought to be only a Caucasian disease," she explains.

"If you're not of a certain race or ethnicity, you can't have CF," Wright adds. "But the disease doesn't discriminate — it just has to have the right environment."

Now a few days past his 60th birthday, Wright no longer runs back-to-back marathons or cycles 100 miles,

things he did before he knew what his disease was even though they caused him considerable pain.

"Now that I'm older, I understand I should have done a lot of things differently," he says.

A master gardener (the 2016 Pulaski County Master Gardener of the Year) whose projects include a vegetable garden at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion, he takes more precautions with his health to reduce that "right environment," including wearing a respirator in the garden so he doesn't breathe in dust, soil and mold. He treats his CF with a nebulizer, antibiotics and other methods for keeping his lungs and sinuses clear; he takes various

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Michele Wright and husband Terry Wright co-founded the National Organization of African Americans with Cystic Fibrosis. The organization helps educate and bring awareness to the disease and provides resources for Black Americans. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Sarah Edwards)

## Top six

Pictured below are the six most expensive houses sold in Little Rock during the week of July 18-22, 2022. "Sold" refers to the date on which the real estate deed was recorded by the Pulaski County circuit clerk, irrespective of the actual sale date.

The prices of these houses, calculated from the clerk's public records, are published in **bold type** in today's Business and Farm section.



**1. 2400 N. Taylor St.** Owned by Jeff Fuller Homes LLC, this house was sold to Tiffany Lindsey and the Tiffany W. Lindsey Revocable Trust.



**2. 13 Pinehurst Circle** Owned by Christina and William Martin, this house was sold to Joana and Jeffery Mack.



**3. 5226 Edgewood Road** Owned by Kathryn and Bryan Mullooly, this house was sold to Sonia and Jeffrey Orcutt.



**4. 500 E. Ninth St.** Owned by Karol Zoeller, this house was sold to Anna and Zachary Lewis.



**5. 39 River Ridge Circle** Owned by Jill and Richard Turnage, this house was sold to Abigail and Edward Womble.



**6. 210 Falstone Cove** Owned by Coburn Construction LLC, this house was sold to Mohanned Ahmed and Areej Ali.

## Wrights

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enzymes to make digestion possible.

"I'm still active," he says, "but I put that energy into gardening. Paying attention to detail and using heavy equipment is how I get my exercise."

His wife, Michele, who earned a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, with a double specialization in health and leadership policy, has a considerable background in pharmaceutical and biotechnology sales and healthcare administration. She recognized the possibility in the early 2000s.

Maybe it was the two trips to the emergency room every week — that's where they spent their honeymoon — or the eight-hour 2001 surgery on her husband's pancreas that his doctor thought more closely resembled the organ of a 90-year-old. The post-surgical scars, Wright recalls, made him look "like a Civil War doctor had got hold of me."

The North Little Rock couple subsequently founded the National Organization of African Americans with Cystic Fibrosis. They are also the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's 2022 Breath of Life honorees, and the focus of the nonprofit's annual Finest Gala, Oct. 22 at Argenta Plaza in North Little Rock. The \$250-a-ticket, black-tie event will include a seated dinner, music, live and silent auctions and drink specials.

Terry Wright, who wrote a book titled "Terry's Journey into CF Land" to help children with a CF diagnosis, is the foundation's first Breath of Life Honoree who is a person with the disease. The Wrights



**Michele Wright** wrote and directed "54 Years Late," a short film covering her husband Terry's ordeal before and after being diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at age 54. The 31-minute film receives its Arkansas premiere Saturday at Little Rock's Ron Robinson Theater. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Sarah Edwards)

are also the area chapter's first honorees of color.

### MAKING A FILM

Michele Wright wrote and directed a short film, "54 Years Late: The Terry Wright Story," which will screen at 3 p.m. Saturday at Little Rock's Ron Robinson Theater, 100 River Market Ave.

The 31-minute film has been shown at various film festivals (where it has garnered honors — "65 accolades," Michele Wright says proudly, including a nomination for a 2022 Black Reels Award in the Outstanding Short category).

But this will be its Arkansas premiere.

"We'd been to all these film festivals, but never had a screening at home," Wright says.

It's a benefit for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation; tickets are \$54 and the theater will sell concessions. Doors open at 2:30 p.m. Visit [finest.cff.org/54-years-late](http://finest.cff.org/54-years-late).

"It's a seed of love to do a movie screening and donate back to the foundation," says the director.

The Wrights' efforts to combat CF don't stop there. In coordination with Dr. Jen-

nifer Taylor-Cousar, a pediatric and adult pulmonologist at National Jewish Health in Denver, they have developed the Wright Cystic Fibrosis Screening Tool to help people self-identify symptoms and to help medical providers identify people who may have the genetic disease, "especially those who are Black, indigenous and people of color," according to a news release. More than 10 million Americans are symptomless carriers of the defective gene.

Michele Wright is also an advocate for "Terry Wright's Law," which will require the use of all known cystic fibrosis-causing gene variants and mutations for newborn screening and diagnostic testing.

Among her many honors, she is the 2022 USA Today Woman of the Year for Arkansas. She is also the founder and chief executive officer of two corporations: My Water Buddy and My Learning Buddy.

The former involves a cast of "creative, fun, relatable, and aspirational characters fashioned as anthropomorphic organs," explains a news release, that promotes the benefits of drinking water and educates children and families about achieving a more fulfilling quality of life through a healthier lifestyle. My Learning Buddy uses the same characters to encourage and involve elementary and special education students in total body participation in the classroom.

"One of my characters was a lung before I knew [Terry] had CF," she says with a chuckle.

For more information:

National Organization of African Americans with Cystic Fibrosis: [noaacf.org](http://noaacf.org)

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation: [cff.org](http://cff.org)

Finest Gala: [finest.cff.org/LRFinest](http://finest.cff.org/LRFinest)

## The golden age of thrifting is going away

ISABELLA GRULLÓN PAZ  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Tina Koepple grew up thrifting. When she was younger, she would spend weekends going to thrift stores with her mother, hunting for unique trinkets and garments but mostly looking for quality items to fit into her family's tight budget. Now in her 40s and with a daughter of her own, Koepple has carried the thriftiness of her youth into adulthood. Most of the furniture and decor in her home came from thrift stores. All of her clothes, except for her socks and underwear, were bought secondhand.

But lately, "there's just less and less desirable items," Koepple said. Early in the coronavirus pandemic, she began to notice that her local thrift stores in Lincoln, Neb., were filling up with items from Shein, LuLaRoe, Fashion Nova and other fast-fashion brands, whose garments tend to be relatively inexpensive, often adapting designs from small shops and high-end labels.

At the time, she assumed it was because people were cleaning out their closets while stuck at home.

"I'd go into thrift stores thinking I could find a few things for my wardrobe or for my family, and it would just be absolute, you know, garbage on the racks," Koepple said. "Like stained fast-fashion clothes that nobody wants." But even now, she has still been finding fast-fashion items, sometimes with tags still on them, hanging on the racks.

### RISE OF FAST FASHION

The rise of fast fashion has changed the way younger women shop for clothes, according to Megan McSherry, 25, a sustainable fashion educator. It is "nearly impossible," she said, to scroll on social media without running into so-called haul videos showing hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars' worth of garments from Zara or Shein.

"Those hauls just encourage overconsumption," McSherry said. "And there's no way that all of those items are going to be constantly worn."

Because of the rise of thrifting, what isn't worn ends up getting donated, McSherry said. Although it's a better option than sending clothes straight to a landfill, she said, thoughtless donating can direct lower-quality items to people who really need them, while also driving up thrift stores' operating costs.

"If you donate trash to a thrift store, it doesn't just disappear," said Adam Minter, the author of "Secondhand: Travels in the New Global Garage Sale." He added that smaller stores in particular could easily become overwhelmed by incoming garments, making it

"much harder to do the business of running a thrift store."

He said his research had shown that thrift stores have no shortage of donations, especially in recent years. But an increase in donations has led to increased business costs. Stores need more employees and more time to sort through the clothes. Inventory and lack of space mean more clothes need to get either sold into the export market for a lower cost or disposed of, which has a financial cost, he said. That means that what does get sold on the store's floor — which is usually 20% of donations — is priced higher to make up the cost of running the store.

### A 186% INCREASE

But more choices do not necessarily mean higher quality. Last year, the online consignment store ThredUp received more clothing than any other year since its founding in 2009, with many of those items coming from fast-fashion retailers, the company said. Compared with 2020, there was a 186% increase in the number of items listed from Shein and a 75% increase in pieces from PrettyLittleThing, a ThredUp spokeswoman said.

"There are all these clothes out there, but it's just that they may not be as durable as you would like," Minter said. Because of fast fashion, more than 60% of fabric fibers are now synthetics, derived from fossil fuels.

This is alarming for the generations of women who have

been thrifting for decades as a way of filling their closets affordably with garments made of high-quality materials.

"I'd say that the golden age of thrifting is over," Megan Miller, 65, said. "The ability to find high-quality, well-made things is definitely on the wane."

She said the predominance of fast-fashion items in stores where she lives in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., on the banks of the Colorado River, has become hard to ignore. Encountering so many fast-fashion items while browsing frustrated her, she said, because probably "they were made by somebody making pennies on the dollar in terrible conditions" to feed the "rapid turnover of seasons or trends."

Despite the less desirable options, Miller still ventures out to thrift.

"There is something ingrained in me about not paying outrageous prices for something that I know that I could — if I'm just patient — find at the thrift store for a fraction of the price," Miller said.

### 'IT WOULD TAKE MINUTES'

Angela Petraline, 52, owner of Dorothea's Closet Vintage, an online boutique operated out of Des Moines, Iowa, has been thrifting since the 1980s. "It would take minutes to find something cool," she said of the old days. "Now I'm lucky to find anything cool at all."

"You used to be able to find high-quality vintage items: silk, cashmere," she said. "That's rarer now." Petraline said that

although she rarely found items in thrift stores for herself anymore, she had begun visiting them to find garments for her teenage son. During summers they went to nearby towns to avoid the cheaply made clothing clogging their local stores.

"But even then, it becomes almost all fast fashion," she said. "Which is incredibly depressing: You drive 60 miles and you're like, 'Well, why did I do this?'"

For Koepple, the glut of fast fashion recently became more inconvenient. Early this year, she began hunting for work clothes in preparation for her re-entry into the workforce. (In May, she received her master's degree in instructional design and technology.)

She said that even though it was considerably more difficult to find the items that she needed this year than it had been when she last had to look for work clothes, she wasn't interested in the other inexpensive options in her area, like Target or Old Navy. Unimpressed by pieces from big-box stores that are made out of synthetic fibers and sometimes begin to fray after a couple of washes, she craved the linen, wool and cashmere that she used to find.

"I like my clothes to last, and I understand how clothes are made," Koepple said. "I want clothes that will still look good after I've worn them multiple times."

"It shouldn't be harder to find good stuff," she added.

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