



KYLE MOOTY/THE LEDGER

Eric Kepler (center) is given the hand-propelled recumbent bicycle from Chuck Seitz of the Wounded Veterans Steering Committee on Monday afternoon. Also pictured (back row, from left) are Doug Allgood, Trey Shiver and Conrad Stempel of the Steering Committee, CW4 Steve Sheahan and Larry Foots, Kepler's father-in-law. Also pictured is Diego, Kepler's War Veteran Service Dog.

Wounded Vet gets "blessing" from local group

BY KYLE MOOTY
kmooty@eprisenow.com

A hand-propelled recumbent bicycle originally purchased in Germany found its way to a Wounded Veteran in Huntsville, all thanks to several people in Enterprise.

On Monday, Wounded Veteran Eric Kepler, 36, was the recipient of the bike that was gifted to him, beginning with fellow Wounded Veteran Tony Vilardo and his wife, Kelly, of Enterprise. Vilardo was no longer able to use the bike.

The Wounded Veteran Steering Committee in Enterprise was contacted, and they had been approached via a small community-based outfit in Anniston that said it could use such a bicycle for Kepler, who was now living at Redstone Arsenal.

It was a first giveaway of its kind for

the Steering Committee, since Kepler was actually living at home.

Limited use of his lower extremities due to contracting a disease in Afghanistan in September 2012, Kepler has since experienced other problems with his ankles, feet and spine.

Doctors have told him they cannot operate due to nerve damage.

He and his family moved onto Redstone Arsenal in February.

"I've been trying to get out and move as much as I can, and this will help me move a whole lot more," Kepler said. "This is such a blessing.

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Kepler was brought to Enterprise Monday by his father-in-law, Larry Foots. Accompanying Kepler on the trip was his War Veteran Service Dog, Diego.

Kepler and his wife, Susan, have four children: three boys and a girl ages, 7 to 19.

Tony Vilardo is a veteran of Desert Storm still living in Enterprise.

"(Vilardo) just wanted to pay it forward," Stempel said.