

The Sunday Sun

Warner Robins, Georgia — Sunday, November 12, 1995

The First Park Newspaper
© 1995 PARK NEWSPAPERS OF GEORGIA, INC.



Staff Photo by Norman Hoesch

GETTING SOME HELP — Wayne Willeby, in bed, and his wife, Emily, center, listen as Walt Harris explains the computer apparatus that will help Willeby communicate with his family and others.

Lou Gehrig's Disease victim gets computer aid

By **KIMBERLY CASSEL PRITCHETT**
Sun Staff Writer

When Wayne Willeby began losing his grip on things in 1987, he just passed it off as a slipped disk or muscle spasm, but soon he realized that there was much more to it than met the eye.

The use of his right was the first to go, but Wayne refused to acknowledge it until he could not keep a grip on a coffee cup at a youth league football game he was coaching for the Warner Robins Recreation Department.

Wayne finally went to a neurologist, and then to two other neurologists, all of which told him the same thing — he had Lou Gehrig's disease, a fatal neuromuscular disease characterized by the chronic progressive degeneration of motor neurons. The disease leads to muscle weakness, muscle atrophy and eventually death from respiratory failure.

From there, the disease progressed to his left arm, his hands began to

weaken and it became harder and harder to eat.

"Wayne fought it all the way through," his devoted wife and caretaker, Emily, said.

In January 1988, Wayne had to quit his job as a foreman for the City of Warner Robins Utility Department because going to work was too big of a stress on his body.

From the arms, the disease progressed to his legs and walking became difficult. Still coaching youth league football, Wayne finally gave up in September 1988 and got a wheelchair. From there, muscle deterioration of his legs was rapid and by Christmas 1990, he could no longer get around without the use of the chair.

In the summer of 1991, Wayne's healthcare nurse advised that he get a tracheal and G-tube for feeding and dispensation of fluids to keep him from choking. Wayne went through the operation like a trooper, knowing he would never speak with his own voice again.

The following summer, Wayne

See Lou Gehrig's, Page A-2