



PHOTO BY LACEY STORER

Dr. Eric Dyck (right) catches up with former patient Phyllis Burdge and her service dog, Justice, last Friday. Dyck and Burdge hadn't seen each other in almost 15 years.

## MS patient reunites with Louisburg doctor

### Woman treks across U.S. to raise awareness

By Lacey Storer

Staff Writer

"Hey babe, how are you?" Louisburg doctor Eric Dyck asked Phyllis Burdge as she walked into Louisburg Family Care Friday.

"I'm great, don't you think?" his former patient replied.

"Better than last time I saw you."

That reply was a bit of an understatement, because the last time Dyck had seen Burdge, almost 15 years ago, she hadn't been able to walk, sit upright, or even hold her head up, due to complications caused by multiple sclerosis.

On Friday, Burdge drove herself into Louisburg and walked into Dyck's office with the help of her service dog, Justice. Burdge is traveling to Florida as part of her PB&J (Phyllis Burdge and Justice) American Walkabout. She is walking four hours every day she travels in order to raise awareness about

handicapped people, speaking to various groups along the way.

As she sat in Dyck's office, talking about her experience, Dyck said he never thought this day would come.

"I didn't imagine seeing her mobile," he said.

The two met when Dyck was one of Burdge's doctors at Hays Family Practice in Hays, Kan. Burdge had been diagnosed with MS in the mid 1980's, and her health went downhill quickly after that.

About 10 years later, in June 1997, Burdge was in bad shape. She couldn't move her left side or hold up her head. Her hands were clenched in fists so tight her knuckles were constantly white. She was hooked up to a feeding tube, a catheter and, occasionally, an oxygen tank.

When one of her doctors made a home visit, Burdge

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## MS patient walks again

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asked her for her honest opinion — would things ever get better? The answer was no. But, she said, "We both know that God's in control, and he may have other plans."

That left Burdge with hope. And in spring 1998, it seemed as if God was moving along with those plans. Burdge began noticing small differences in herself, like her hands beginning to unclench. By May she was well enough to attend her nephew's graduation in Liberal, Kan. And on Nov. 20 she took her first step in 12 years.

Seven years later to the day, Burdge began her PB&J American Walkabout at the Hays Medical Center, where she took her first steps.

Burdge said she first thought of the idea when she was sick and confined to her bed.

"I'd just lay there, hour after hour, day after day," she said, "and I thought 'if this ever changes, if this ever turns around the other way, I'm going to do something crazy, like skateboard across the country.'"

She decided on walking instead, and is now making her way to Florida, stopping along the way to speak to groups about her experience and to send a hopeful message to other disabled people.

"(When I was ill) I began to feel I'd lived out my usefulness," she said, "and I know there are a lot of people that feel that way, and it's an awful feeling."

Burdge said she wants to raise awareness about handicapped people and let them, and others, know that they have value and a purpose, no matter what physical condition they are in.

She hopes her story will inspire others, because being able to tell it encourages her.

"I feel like I had a miracle," she said.