



## **Dr. Don Schoendorfer**

Founder and President, Free Wheelchair Mission

Don Schoendorfer is a biomedical engineer who makes his home in Santa Ana, California. He enjoys spending time with his three daughters and his two amazing granddaughters. He has an undergraduate degree from Columbia University and holds a PhD in Mechanical Engineering from MIT.

Professionally, Don has headed R&D departments in numerous biomedical companies, including Haemonetics and Baxter Healthcare. He holds more than 60 U.S. patents in the field of medical technology and pioneered practical transdermal diagnostics as well as blood cell separation technology.

About 17 years ago, Don turned his God-given and MIT-developed engineering talents to solving the problem of immobility in developing nations. According to the World Health Organization, there are an estimated 70 million adults and children living with disabilities in the developing world, many of whom live in poverty and isolation. The causes of disability range from diseases that have been eradicated elsewhere to injuries from land mines and war. For many of these people, medical aid is simply not available; adaptive equipment is even scarcer.

Dr. Schoendorfer devised an answer to the need for mobility: a low-cost, high-durability wheelchair made from a resin lawn chair, metal tubing, and bicycle tires, dubbed the GEN\_1. This innovative solution to a pressing problem can be manufactured and shipped for the price of \$80 USD. In 2009, Don introduced the GEN\_2 wheelchair, an evolution of the iconic GEN\_1, designed to be a more adaptable but still-low-cost version of its predecessor. The GEN\_2 was approved in 2012 by the FDA. In 2014, Don introduced the GEN\_3 wheelchair. A foldable version - for easy storage and transport - of the GEN\_2 wheelchair. The GEN\_3 wheelchair was approved by the FDA in 2013.

In 2001, Don's nonprofit organization, Free Wheelchair Mission, was awarded 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. Articles about Free Wheelchair Mission have appeared in *USA Today*, *Readers Digest*, *The Orange County Register*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *People Magazine*. Don was personally honored with the "Above and Beyond Citizen Award" by the White House Congressional Medal of Honor Society for the work that Free Wheelchair Mission has done around the world. Don was one of three individuals selected to receive the honor in 2008 at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.

Since 2001, more than one million wheelchairs have been given to people who desperately need them in 93 countries worldwide.

**Transforming lives through the gift of mobility™**