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Dr. John Knight checks up on patient Freddie Nesbitt, who lost his left thumb in an accident a

year ago. Recently Knight attached Nesbitt's left big toe in place of the missing digit.

Innovative surgical procedure restores man's missing thumb

■ Operation has not been done in this area before.

By FERNANDO PIZARRO
The Times

As Freddie Nesbitt tells it, this is one Christmas he won't soon forget.

The 47-year-old Vivian man lost his left thumb after oil field equipment fell on it last Dec. 29. Surgeons reattached the damaged thumb, but it did not survive.

Now, Schumpert Medical Center surgeons have removed his left big toe and attached it to his hand during 12 hours of surgery Tuesday.

With physical therapy, Nesbitt will learn to use the toe as he

once used his thumb and eventually regain much, if not all, of the use of his hand. He'll also be able to walk after a little work.

"I'm sore all over," said Nesbitt, recovering in a general care room at the medical center Christmas Eve. "But as far as having the transplant, I'm glad I've done it. I've been off work for almost a year now, and I'm ready to go back." Nesbitt has worked on oil fields since he was 16.

Dr. John Knight, the microvascular surgeon at Schumpert Medical Center who performed the procedure, said Nesbitt is recovering just fine and will leave the hospital in about a week.

"Everything's gone better than expected," said Knight, who was assisted in the surgery by his brother, plastic surgeon Dr. Dan

Knight. "This is a very unique procedure that's not done very often. Hopefully with the exposure, people will know that it's available."

Knight said checks of charts at Willis-Knighton and Louisiana State University medical centers confirm this is the first time the procedure was done here.

For his part, Nesbitt said he's ready to start the daily physical therapy to walk and relearn to use his hand. "I want to get to walking and working because I never was a lazy person. I'm in good spirits so far. I've never let it get me down."

Nesbitt will be in a wheelchair for about two weeks and will take aspirin daily to keep the blood flowing to his new thumb, Knight said.