

New Britain

Injured Teacher Credits Hard Work, Family and Hospital

Biz Buzz

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Submitted by Chris Senecal on 12-11-2008.

This past summer, on an early July morning, Chris Serra, of Middletown, was on top of the world. The 27-year-old health and physical education teacher was completing a master's degree, while teaching summer school and coaching on the side. In a few short days he would be celebrating his wedding engagement at a party for 200 guests.

All that changed in an instant when the speeding van came out of nowhere. When Chris finally awoke in traction in intensive care, there was hardly a bone in his athletic body that had not been shattered.

His broken limbs, held together with steel rods, were heavily swollen, impairing circulation. It was uncertain if he'd suffered brain or spinal cord damage.

Tentatively, his parents, Tom and Maryann Serra, handed him a notepad. "Am I going to live?" was the first barely legible note their son scribbled. "Is Amy still going to marry me?" came next.

He would live, and he and Amy would keep their wedding date, but not before two months of intensive physical rehabilitation at the Hospital for Special Care.

Middlesex Chamber President Larry McHugh referred the Serras to Hospital for Special Care, the only medically- complex rehabilitation and chronic disease hospital in the United States serving adults and children across the continuum of care.

As Chris now tells it, his therapy began long before he could even sit up in bed. Weeks later, he "graduated" to the parallel bars, fighting excruciating pain but resolutely determined to gain back whatever mobility he could.

Chris credits his physical therapist, Dave Pelland, RPT, and his occupational therapist Karyn Harry, COTA, for gently pushing him every step of the way.

"They adapted to my needs; they were very creative," says Chris. And when he hurt the most, "Dave would talk sports to distract me."

"The staff 'treated' all of us," adds Tom Serra. "My wife and Amy were here day and night. The family apartments on the property made that possible. Everything was clean and beautiful both inside and out. Even the landscaping was impressive."

When the edema in Chris' limbs held him back during those long months, he pushed on with the encouragement of his physician, William Pesce, MD. "He explained everything in a way I could understand. There was always the sense that I could accomplish this,"

recalls Chris.

He also mentions his certified nurse assistant, Pat Brown, CNA. "She kept me laughing." "All the nurses were so caring, so gentle," adds Maryann Serra. Now, six months after the accident, Chris walks with a leg brace and crutch but expects to shed these over time. He also continues to reflect on his Hospital for Special Care stay.

"It's a beautiful, healing place," he recalled. "I saw patients with spinal cord and brain injuries who were struggling too. It made me want to work harder. The atmosphere was positive, that each of us could succeed."

In an expression of gratitude for the efforts of the staff and volunteers at Hospital for Special Care, Chris Serra and his family will be making a special presentation on Dec. 23 at 1:30 PM at the Hospital, 2150 Corbin Ave. in New Britain.