

Madonna patient “gets busy living”

Gary Dacus of Wichita, Kan., coveted the 2007 Harley Davidson from the first time he spotted it. He soon became the proud owner of the black cherry beauty, but he didn't just slap down his money and ride off into the sunset.

Fifty-four-year-old Gary understood the risks associated with motorcycling. Being proactive about his safety, he completed “The Rider's Edge,” a sanctioned Harley course for beginner riders offered at his dealer's store. He stuck to low-traffic roads, riding mainly to and from work. Despite his efforts, Gary lay sprawled on a Wichita street, fighting for his life.

On July 20, 2007, Gary was hit by a vehicle at an intersection, run over and then drug approximately 75 feet. His condition was stabilized at Via Christi-St. Francis in Wichita following multiple surgeries and trauma that included a broken fibula and fractures to his C-5, C-6 vertebrae, which resulted in an incomplete spinal cord injury. Weakened from the trauma and ventilator dependent, was flown by helicopter ambulance to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in August. Gary, along with his wife, Jean, and his rehabilitation team at Madonna established a comprehensive plan to meet Gary's goals.

“The staff at Madonna weaned me off the vent within days. It was one of my goals and that's when I knew I had chosen the best rehabilitation facility,” Gary said. A former building project manager, Gary was used to being a decision-maker. He was physically active and enjoyed hunting, fishing and golfing. “I have five grandkids and wanted my

independence back, but knew I'd have to adapt.” Gary said the aggressive physical and occupational therapy helped to rebuild his atrophied muscles.

A rehabilitation highlight came when Gary learned to pitch himself forward in his wheelchair to relieve pressure points. “I equate a spinal cord injury with a snowflake—no two are alike. I count all my successes,” Gary added.

In preparation for his Halloween-discharge date, Jean packed up the “wall of prayer,” an extensive photo collection of family and friends. The photos were a reminder of the support that buoyed him during his more challenging days. Not one to resign to hopelessness, Gary quotes his favorite line from the movie *Shawshank Redemption*—“Get busy living, or get busy dying. I'm choosing the former,” he said.



Gary Dacus works out on the FES Bike as Janelle Hansen, physical therapist, looks on. The FES Bike uses computerized functional electrical stimulation to allow patients with neurological or spinal cord injury to actively pedal a stationary leg-cycle.