



Larry and Carolyn Ford

Photos: Cindy Ratermann

Accident gives Larry Ford a grand tour of Atrium

road to

The first warm day in March last year inspired Larry Ford to take a ride on his motorcycle. It was great to feel the wind and balmy sun on his face. But his perfect day ended in one horrible moment — Larry’s path was crossed by a truck, and he and his motorcycle crashed into the back of it.

When the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) team arrived, they knew Larry’s injuries required immediate medical attention. From the scene of the accident, the EMS team called in a trauma alert to let Atrium’s Emergency Trauma Center (ETC) know that a patient was on his way.

Gary Cobb, MD, FACS, MS, trauma surgeon at Atrium, was the first physician to examine Larry. “He had been in and out of consciousness, but Mr. Ford was awake and alert when he arrived. He had multiple fractures,” says Dr. Cobb, “but he wore a helmet so he didn’t sustain any trauma to his head.”

CT scans were quickly done of Larry’s head, neck, chest, abdomen and pelvis, and showed that he not only sustained several fractures but also had a small hematoma (gathering of blood cells) in his spleen. “He was pretty beat up, so we admitted him to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to monitor him,” Dr. Cobb adds.

Bumps in the road

“The most serious injury was a major fracture involving the joint surface of Larry’s right knee,” says James Abbott, MD, the orthopedic surgeon on call that day. “We had to install a temporary ‘halo’ device with

reco

pins and bars on the outside of his leg and wait for the swelling to go down. A shoulder fracture complicated matters, but didn't require surgery." A week later, when Larry was stable, Dr. Abbott performed an "internal fixation," placing metal plates and screws internally around the fractured bones of his right knee.

After a few days, Larry was able to move out of the ICU to Atrium's fourth floor to recover from surgery. "The whole team was constantly taking care of me and Carolyn, my wife," he says. "She stayed with me as long as I was in the hospital. Fortunately, I had a laptop so she could get her work done and check in on me, too."

But some complications followed. "Larry got up for therapy and had a drop in his blood pressure," says Ashley Duley, RN, clinical manager on the fourth floor, who took care of Larry after his surgeries. "His mental alertness and vital signs declined, and he fainted when being transferred from the chair to his bed after therapy. I called the Acute Care Team (ACT) to get more hands on the problem."

The ACT is a rapid-response team of clinicians, including a critical-care nurse, a respiratory therapist and a physician, who support the nursing staff in critical care situations.

After assessing his symptoms, the ACT staff did further tests and another CT scan. The tests showed the hematoma on

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his spleen had suddenly worsened and led to a rupture. Dr. Cobb performed emergency surgery to remove Larry’s ruptured spleen.

While helping Larry recover from his surgeries, his caregivers noticed signs of infection in his leg and called in Anwer Siddiqui, MD, MPH, medical director of Infectious Diseases at Atrium, to help with infection control.

“Injuries from traumatic accidents are at high risk of infection because the wounds can become contaminated with soil and debris from the road,” says Dr. Siddiqui. “We treated Larry with intravenous antibiotics for six weeks because his injuries affected deep tissues.”

From that point, Larry was finally able to concentrate on his recovery. His primary care physician, Marvin Ray, MD, and chaplain Jesse Thornton, director of Pastoral Care at Atrium, checked on Larry every day. “And, of course,” says Larry, “it helped for me to have my family, people from church and my friends from the Christian Motorcyclist Association to encourage me.”

Getting back in gear

“While I was on the fourth floor, several therapists came in to show me what I could do by myself,” Larry continues. “Once I started getting better, I moved up to the fifth floor to Rehabilitation.” The hard work of physical and occupational therapy had begun.

Occupational therapists helped Larry work around his new physical limitations so he could feed himself, walk and put on his own clothes. Physical therapists helped him work on regaining his range of motion and flexibility. Larry spent nearly two weeks in Rehabilitation.

“The more active patients become, the less chance that other complications, such as pneumonia, will develop,” explains David K. Magnusen, MD, rehabilitation physician in Atrium’s Rehabilitation Center. “With continued activity, patients gain confidence with each step toward recovery.”

In rehabilitation, Dr. Magnusen explains, “Our goal is to maximize our patients’ functions so that they can succeed once they get home.”

“Before Larry left the Rehabilitation Center, one of the therapists came to our home for an evaluation,” says Larry’s wife, Carolyn. “That service helped us understand what he would need and how our home could be as safe as possible, since he had to use a wheelchair for several weeks.” By making a few modifications, Larry could safely continue to recover at home.

With all of his physical limitations — a sling on his right arm, a wheelchair and a brace that did not allow any weight to be placed on his right leg — Larry had to learn new ways of doing things that most of us take for granted. Putting on clothes, getting up the stairs and bathing were now difficult tasks. With perseverance, Larry learned to use equipment, such as a “reacher” and

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“ I've always seen health care from the outside in. It was amazing. The whole place worked like one big team. ”

a long-handled shoehorn, to help him do things like put on socks and shoes.

“He had a good attitude,” says Dr. Magnusen. “He didn’t want to rely on others at home, and he wanted to do as much for himself as he could.”

Dennis Walker, physical therapist in the Rehabilitation Center, motivated Larry to work through his pain. After he was discharged from the hospital, Larry continued his therapy and recovery for several months at Atrium Sports Medicine & Physical Therapy on campus at Atrium Family YMCA.

“Missy Ptaszkievicz and Steve Woodward in Sports Medicine helped me to go from a wheelchair to a walker, and now I’m walking on my own with a cane,” says Larry. “After I was released from physical therapy, I became a member of the Atrium Family

YMCA, where I can duplicate my therapy exercises and work my muscles in the pool to keep the weight off of my knee.”

“He’s made an exceptional recovery,” says Dr. Abbott. “He’s worked hard to regain the ability to walk and use his arm again.”

Road map

“I never realized all of this was here until I became part of it,” says Larry. It took several physicians and multiple departments working together to care for Larry before he left the hospital. With three surgeries in eight days and a month-long hospital stay, many people at Atrium had a hand in caring for Larry: the ETC, ICU, surgical teams, acute care teams, imaging, laboratory, respiratory, infection control, pastoral care, physicians, patient care assistants, nurses, social workers, therapists and many more clinical care staff. Not to mention all the behind-the-scenes staff in departments like Nutrition Services, Environmental Services, sterilization and many more. “I wish I could remember everyone by name to thank them because they literally saved my life,” says Larry.

He still has some limitations, but overall Larry is doing well. “I’m so thankful to just get up and down stairs,” he says. Larry hopes to get back to work soon but has not yet been released to do so. “I’ve talked to Jesse, the chaplain at Atrium, about volunteering with him to give a little back by helping to perk up somebody who’s feeling down.”

Will Larry Ford ride a motorcycle again? “Well, the bike runs, but I might trade it in for a convertible,” he says. “I’ll let the wind blow through my hair on four wheels instead of two!”

►► Find out more about the many services Atrium offers at AtriumMedCenter.org.



A MODEL TRAUMA CENTER

For the third consecutive time, Atrium has earned re-verification as a Level III Trauma Center by the American College of Surgeons (ACS) Committee on Trauma. The ACS surveyors were impressed by the processes, facility and enthusiastic staff, recognizing Atrium as a “model trauma program.”

Atrium’s Emergency Trauma Center includes 24-hour coverage by trauma surgeons and other medical specialists; in-department X-ray and CT scanners for quick diagnosis; highly qualified staff; and easy accessibility for emergency medical services throughout the region.

Atrium is one of only four verified trauma centers in the tri-state region, and this achievement recognizes the strength and maturity of the program and Atrium’s dedication to providing exceptional care to injured patients.

■ Patty Woodgeard, LSW

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