



AROUND TOWN

Paralysis can't stop this guy

THE ENTIRE COURSE OF your life can change in just a moment.

Tony Peth of Centerville, who turned 28 a week ago today, can testify to that.

It soon will be a year since the awful accident happened. It was Aug. 1, and Peth was competing in an obstacle course event in San Diego, Calif., where he had moved to begin studies to earn his Ph.D. at the University of California.

"I had completed the running phase and the mountain biking. The final obstacle was to jump into a mud pit. I was doing a belly flop into the pit, and there were probably six to 10 inches of water. There should have been mud, but where I landed there was dirt. As it happened, I took a bad fall and broke my neck and sustained a spinal cord injury."

Peth is partially paralyzed, and since that fateful day has undergone intensive physical rehabilitation, initially at Sharp Memorial Rehabilitation Center in San Diego, and later at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton.

He remains paralyzed from the chest down. "Right now, my arms are at about 40 percent" he said. "I have no trunk support so I have to stay in a wheelchair. And I have no use of my hands at all."

Ironically, Peth earned a bachelor's science degree at Miami University in 1995 in health and sports studies, with a major in exercise science.

"I have been a student of physiology and anatomy all my life," he said. "I earned my master's degree in physiological sciences at the University of Arizona last year."

He said his knowledge of the workings of the human body have been a help to him in understanding what has happened.

"I have tried to have a strong positive attitude dealing with this," he said. But as you might know, there are ups and downs, especially when an independent person needs to rely on others for so much.

"I just wish I could get my hands to function. It would be so good. We take things for granted when we have them. But when you can't pick up a telephone, or a fork, and you can't do for yourself, you feel so helpless."

Peth said his family has been super supportive. The youngest son of Barb and James Peth of Centerville, he has an older brother, Mark, and two sisters, Tamara and Jennifer.

"My real rock has been Ashley," he said. "She is amazing. She is incredible." Ashley Porter is his girlfriend. He met her while both were getting degrees at the University of Arizona in Tucson. "She has been at my side since the accident. She is always there," he said. "If I go somewhere, it is because Ashley takes me. She lifts me out of the wheelchair and sits me in the car and we are off. Ashley is definitely a special lady."

Currently, Peth is taking part in a spinal cord research program at Wright State University, and has hopes of teaching there in the fall. "My ultimate dream right now is to build a state of the art rehabilitation center for those with spinal cord injuries," he said.

In the meantime, a shorter-term goal is to continue his therapy and rehabilitation exercises and to see that the growing stack of medical bills get paid.

"It is so expensive, and many things are simply not covered by insurance when you become a victim," he said. "So many family members and friends have been helping. And I am very uncomfortable asking for help. But we still have a lot of bills to pay."

His girlfriend, family and friends are organizing a golf outing, as a fund-raiser, to help assist Peth in paying some of his medical debt.

The event will be held at the Bearcreek Golf Club on Aug. 3, beginning at 1:30 p.m. The sponsors are asking for a \$100 donation from each golfer. If you would like to participate, you can get more information by calling Terry Wenner at 298-6675 or Ashley Porter at 428-0474.

"I'll get through all this, and I will continue my career," Peth said. "It is amazing what you can handle when you have to. Especially when you have a strong backup crew working with you. I just want anyone fighting paralysis to never give up. There is always a chance for better times ahead. Keep on fighting. Keep on working hard. Think positive. And let those who love you know how much you appreciate what they are doing for you."

► Dale Huffman wants your ideas.

Send an e-mail to Dale at dale_huffman@coxohio.com or write to him at 45 S. Ludlow St., Dayton, OH 45402. Phone: 225-2272.