

Rehabilitation Patients Reunite To Thank Former Caregivers

Last year, Ryan Mertens, of Palm Harbor, crashed into a rock wall while riding a motorcycle with friends in California. He was airlifted to a hospital for treatment.

Ryan was in a coma and suffered a severe traumatic brain injury, collapsed lungs and a broken collarbone.

“Basically I was a mess and all but dead,” said Mertens, as he spoke to the audience during the Spring Rehabilitation Patient Reunion in March, the first of two held this year.

When his family got him transferred to TGH’s Rehabilitation Center, Mertens wasn’t able to walk and could only speak a few words.

“Thirty-six days after coming to TGH I walked out of the hospital wearing an AFO (a device that supports the ankle and foot) and using a



Speech therapist Lisa Stanley, left, reunites with her former patient Ryan Mertens, and his mother Jordan Mertens at the Spring Rehabilitation Patient Reunion.

cane,” he said. “I still come here three days a week and work on my recovery. TGH helped teach me I could make progress every day by working hard and doing exercises. I am so thankful for what everyone has done for me,” he said.



Physical therapist Steve Wesenhagen greets Juanita Martinez Gomez during the reunion.

Three years ago Vincent Lanci was attending the University of Tampa when he was struck by a hit and run driver while walking home one night and left for dead. A police officer saw the accident and called an ambulance to take him to Tampa General.

Lanci sustained serious injuries including a brain injury that left him in a coma for three weeks. He then spent several weeks undergoing physical and speech therapy.

“This team got me in the position to succeed in life. I truly owe it

Patients Create Art As Therapy

Rehabilitation Center patient Richard Widel carefully dipped his brush in orange paint and gently brushed it on a small round disk. He was creating an abstract piece of art, a departure from the landscape and scenery oil paintings he frequently creates at home.

The Sun City Center resident, who was recovering from a stroke, was among eight Rehabilitation Center patients who painted as a form of therapy during the Healing Environment through Art program at the Rehabilitation Center.

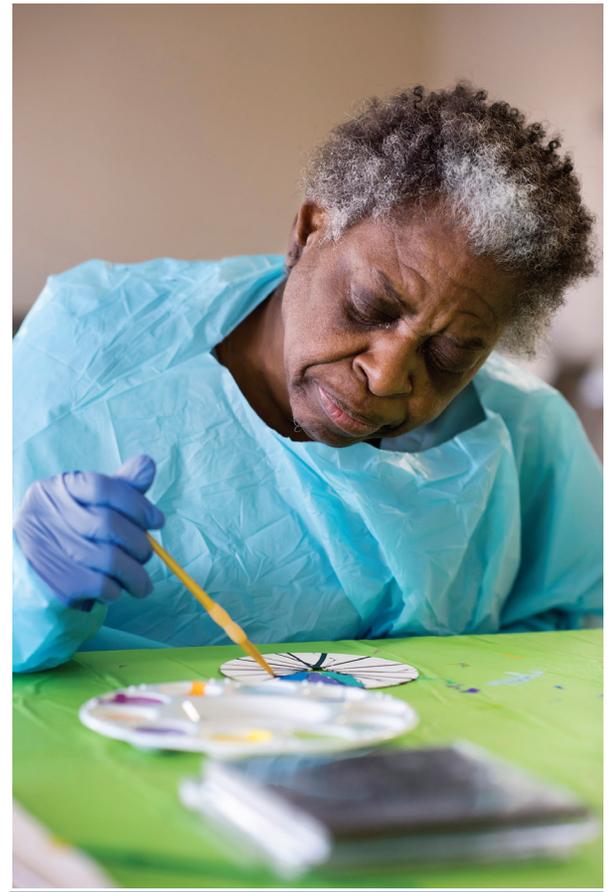


The painted disks were combined into a larger art piece on display in the Rehabilitation Center.

In its fifth year, the class is a joint effort between the Rehabilitation Center and the University of Tampa's (UT) Art Therapy Program. Six UT students assisted patients with their projects.

The program's goal is to introduce patients to art making as a form of relaxation, said Seema Weinstein, Ph.D., manager of the Rehabilitation Center's Psychology-Neuropsychology Services. "It gives them a sense of ability. So often the focus is on what they can't do," she said.

The students would later assemble some of the painted disks into a large art piece for display in the Rehabilitation Center. **EM**



Shirley McMillan adds paint to her project during the Healing Environment through Art program held at the Rehabilitation Center. The program brings UT art therapy students into the hospital to promote recovery through self-expression.



Rehabilitation Center Holds Its Inaugural Fund-Raising Event

The Rehabilitation Center held its first Walk & Roll event in September. Former patients, family members and hospital employees walked and rolled in their wheelchairs along the waterfront. It also featured live music, fresh fruit and snacks, and demos of assistive devices.

The \$1,458 proceeds will be used to provide non-medical supplies, like walking aides and shower benches, to patients in need as they transition home. The center plans to host a larger Walk & Roll event in 2017. **EM**

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all to this staff. I couldn't be more blessed," said Lanci, who graduated from UT and went on to earn a master's degree in Business Administration.

"I spoke at graduation, and after seeing the crowd's reaction, I knew I have a bigger purpose," he said. He's now a motivational speaker and often gives talks at events for non-profit organizations to inspire others.

Kyle Atherton knows what it means to have a second chance. In April, he had a serious motorcycle accident that left him with a traumatic brain injury.

"I was angry at the world, but I'm not like that now," said Atherton during September's Rehabilitation Patient Reunion.

Atherton completed extensive treatment at TGH's Rehabilitation Center following the accident. "I had a great experience coming back," he said. "What you do here is unbelievably selfless," he said to the audience of former patients and



Debra Drew, center, caught up with her rehabilitation therapists at the September reunion. From left: Drew's mother, Harriett Sullivan, Occupational Therapist Mackenzie Piatz, and Physical Therapists Manuel Garcia and Edgar Ladia.

Rehabilitation Center staff who gathered for the event.

Physical Therapist Edgar Ladia was all smiles as he reunited with Atherton, who

gave him a special thank you note and a packaged homemade cookie.

"That's why I like my job," said Ladia. "I get to see my patients come back and say thank you."

Veterinarian Debra Drew told of how in March she suffered a traumatic brain injury during an evening bike ride in South Tampa. She landed on her head when her bike hit a piece of construction material.

Drew was rushed to TGH's Emergency Department, where a doctor quickly discovered she had a brain bleed. She had emergency surgery, followed by rehabilitation.

"I'm riding my bike again with training wheels and another helmet," she said, as she thanked all the caregivers and rehabilitation staff who helped make her recovery possible.

Former patient Nick DeChellis, who was transferred from another hospital to the Rehabilitation Center, also had high praise for his rehabilitation team.

"I could barely move my arm or leg," he said. "Now I can walk. Thank you guys from the bottom of my heart." 



Tampa Generals player Shin Nakazato, left, of Japan, goes wheel to wheel with Brooks Bandits' Steven Walker as they approach the goal cone during the 24th annual Tampa International Wheelchair Rugby Tournament held earlier this year. The teams battled for three overtime periods with the Tampa Generals prevailing, 58-57. Teams from the U.S., Canada, and Switzerland competed. The Tampa Generals team is sponsored by the hospital, and some of its players are former TGH rehabilitation patients.

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About Tampa General Hospital Rehabilitation Services

Rehabilitation Services at Tampa General Hospital is accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for the following:

- Comprehensive Integrated Inpatient Rehabilitation – Adult and Pediatric Rehabilitation Patients

Rehabilitation Services is also designated by the Florida Department of Health as a provider of services to both adult and pediatric Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program (BSCIP) patients. Our services are accredited by

The Joint Commission, and TGH is proud to be a Magnet hospital.

In addition to inpatient programs, the continuum of care includes services provided by hospital-based rehabilitation therapists, outpatient rehabilitation services, and physician services for new and follow-up patients in the Rehabilitation Medical Clinics.



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