

Heroes Lottery proceeds help burn survivor

By Michelle Hopkins for The Vancouver Sun:



Credit: Mike Wakefield

It's been nearly two years and 14 surgeries later, and the memories of the night that changed Brandon Blasbalg's life forever are slowly coming back to the 20-year-old.

On September 20, 2008, the young North Vancouver resident was driving home from a friend's birthday party in Richmond at around 2 a.m. when he fell asleep at the wheel of his 1994 Honda Civic.

His car veered across a median and into the path of a semi-trailer truck, and quickly burst into flames. For several minutes, while an off-duty RCMP officer tried in vain to extinguish the fire, Blasbalg was literally on fire.

Firefighters used the jaws of life to get him out of the burning inferno. Blasbalg was then rushed to hospital with serious burns to his arms, legs and the top of his head. Doctors, he said, didn't expect him to live.

"I was in a coma for three weeks and in hospital for three months," said Blasbalg.

Today, Blasbalg credits the "incredible nurses, doctors and other team of experts at Vancouver General Hospital's B.C. Professional Firefighters' Burn, Plastic and Trauma Unit for saving his life and keeping him alive.

"The Burn Unit have the best people in the world and they treated me so well," said the young man. "Dr. Papp has been my surgeon through every one of my surgeries and he's a really amazing doctor."

He went on to say: "My skin grafts on my neck and right shoulder, which were the worst burnt, are healing quite nicely. For the first time since my accident, if I wear sunscreen I can go out in the sun."

After his next scheduled surgery, set for sometime in September of this year, Blasbalg has his sights set on becoming a fire fighter.

"I'm going to start volunteering and then after my skin graft heals in three months, I'm going to apply."

Ron Dumouchelle, President & CEO of VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation, says funds raised from the Hometown Heroes Lottery are vitally important to the hospital and to patients like Blasbalg.

Proceeds support the purchase of urgently needed diagnostic imaging and critical care equipment for some of the most complex illnesses and injuries. Many departments at VGH received much-needed equipment thanks to sales from last year's lottery tickets, including: Intensive Care Unit, OR, Leukemia Bone Marrow Transplant Program, the Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease clinics at UBC Hospital and Orthopedic Trauma. Dumouchelle went on to say that VGH, UBC Hospital

and GF Strong Rehab Centre are three of Canada's leading clinical, research and teaching hospitals. As major international research and innovation centres, they are also B.C.'s main adult health care referral centres for the most complex and serious illnesses and injuries.

Each year, the emergency department at VGH sees approximately 69,000 patients, about a quarter of whom are admitted to the hospital.

"As British Columbia's trauma centre and provincial centre of excellence for trauma and burns, spinal cord injury, and neurosurgery, we provide highly specialized acute care for a growing number of seriously injured or critically ill people from across the province," Dumouchelle says.

Every year, more than 100 severely burned or injured patients are cared for in the 20-bed B.C. Professional Firefighters' Burn, Plastic and Trauma Unit (BPTU) at VGH.

Patients, like Brandon, are often rushed to VGH by ambulance or helicopter. After already having spent days or even weeks in the Intensive Care Unit, fighting for their life, the move to the Burn Unit is just the next stage in the battle, a stage that may last as long as a year before the patient can go home or move to a rehabilitation centre.

The VGH Burn, Plastic and Trauma Unit, which has the reputation as one of the best places in the country for its specialized care with burn survivors, is the largest of its kind in the province. It's where patients with compound injuries to multiple body systems can return to health.

It's the only place in B.C. where severely burned patients can be constantly monitored and receive the in-

tensive and specialized care they need. It's the only place in the province where people who need major reconstructive plastic surgery due to injuries or pressure ulcers or complex microvascular surgery (reattaching severed limbs) receive treatment.

Dr. Anthony Papp is the medical director, clinical associate professor at VGH's BC Professional Firefighters' Burn, Plastic and Trauma Unit.

He is also Brandon Blasbalg's doctor.

"We get the most severe and worst burn victims in the province," Papp says. "We treat 90 patients a year and about 10 to 15 per cent of them need to be in ICU."

"We provide world class care in both the ICU and burn unit."

Since Papp took over the burn unit three years ago, they have lowered the length of stay by 30 to 40 per cent.

"Previously, patients had to submit to painful dressing changes every day," Papp says. "Now we have one-week dressings ... so we have gone from on average 14 dressings to two, and patients heal faster and get home sooner."

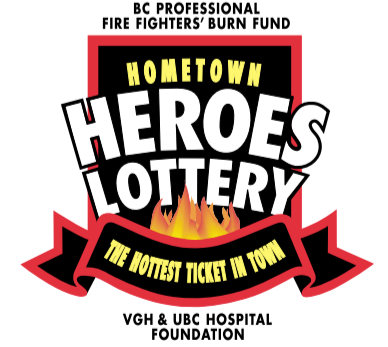
In addition to supporting VGH, the Hometown Heroes Lottery also supports the BC Professional Fire Fighters' Burn Fund. The Burn Fund represents more than 3,700 professional firefighters from around B.C. and the Yukon and uses the proceeds to help further Burn Awareness, Research, and Prevention programs, the Adult Burn Survivor Program and Burn Camp for young survivors.

Time is running out to get in on one of the most exciting lotteries in the province with thousands of magnificent prizes, including the Grand Prize dream home package worth more

than \$2.1 million. This lavish 6,500 square home in South Surrey comes with more than \$150,000 worth of Casual Home by Jordans' furnishings, window coverings and accessories throughout, \$20,000 tax-free cash, a choice of either a BMW 128i or 2010 Honda Crosstour EX-L, and a \$5,000 vacation.

Or there is also a fabulous False Creek Millennium Water Vancouver luxury prize home package worth \$1.8 million. Or you can choose \$1.6 million tax free cash (Winner will choose one prize option - other prize options will not be awarded).

To take a virtual tour of the home or to purchase tickets, please visit www.heroeslottery.com.



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