

Paralyzed Hall of Fame wrestler plans to walk again

AVON LAKE

By Lori E. Switaj

"It's just a question of when."

Those are the words of Keith Concar, paralyzed from the waist down, as to when he's going to walk again.

Concar, a member of the 1995-96 Avon Lake High School wrestling team who has been inducted in the Sports Hall of Fame, was injured in a motorcycle accident in 2006 while volunteering to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

After the hurricane, he left his local job, closed up his Kent apartment, and moved to Slidell, La., to help Hurricane Katrina victims rebuild, traveling to the area with a church mission group.

"Keith and another young man, Josh, would get up every morning to cook breakfast for over 200 volunteers," Keith's mother, Sandy Concar, said shortly after the accident. "This was their way to pay for their room and board,

while staying at the church. They would then be assigned their jobs for the day and return after dark."

In June 2006, a run of bad luck started. Keith was rear-ended while driving his 2000 Ford Explorer. He received neck and shoulder injuries and his vehicle was totaled. Insurance did not cover the damages.

Without a car, he began relying on his 2005 Shadow motorcycle for transportation. On July 28, while traveling on a Louisiana highway, a woman pulled out of her driveway without looking, and drove right into Keith's path. She was cited for failure to yield, but the damage caused was immeasurable. He spent almost a month in the hospital, and was released just prior to his 28th birthday.

In addition to other injuries, Keith sustained a T-12 (thoracic) injury to his spine.

"I'm what they call an 'incomplete,'" he said from San Diego last week, in a telephone interview. "My spinal cord wasn't severed."

Following the accident, Keith moved to Raleigh, N.C., close to where his parents had relocated and began adjusting to life in a wheelchair. He received therapy and participated in several studies at medical centers, including Duke University and Wake Forest University.

He soon realized he was being taught how to live in a wheelchair.

"The doctors at first were telling me I'll never walk again," he said.

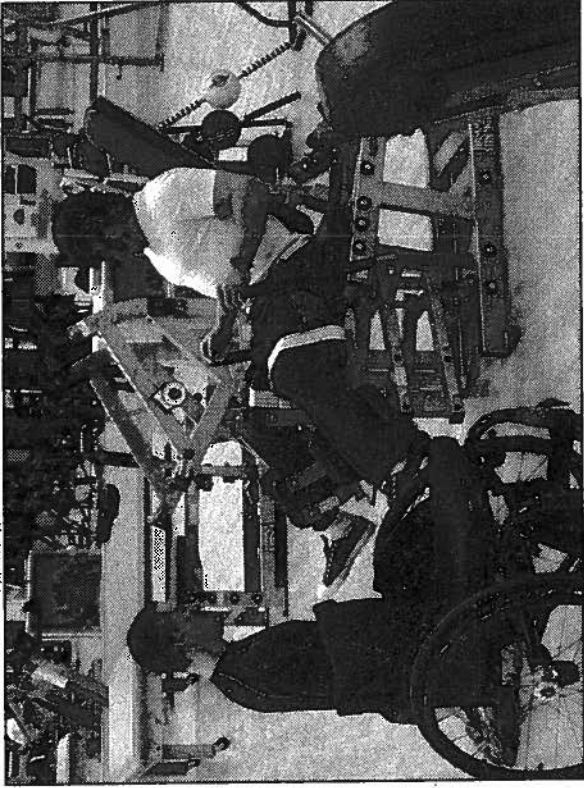
Instead of accepting that prognosis, he began looking around for other therapy options and learned of Project Walk (projectwalk.org) in San Diego. In November, he relocated to California to begin intense therapy.

The results have been astounding.

"I'm making leaps and bounds," he said of the progress. "In two months, I've already had more progress than the other years combined."

Project Walk treats exclusively spinal cord injuries or spinal development patients. Keith said intensive therapy, including "muscle memorization," massage therapy and acupuncture, have helped him.

"It's very intensive; there's no breaks," he said. "Initially I couldn't feel anything below my belly button. Now I can



Keith Concar (right) has made remarkable progress since starting therapy at Project Walk. Now, he needs financial help to continue therapy.

feel all the way down to my knees. I can kick out my legs now. There's movement in all these muscles."

The therapy comes with a cost, upward of \$2,000 a month. Presently, Keith is not working so he can focus on his progress.

"It's an hour drive, and I'm in therapy four hours a day," he said.

Keith drives himself with a car configured with hand controls.

He hopes to secure a job soon to help pay with living expenses.

Now the former wrestler is in need of financial help to get him back on his feet. His Social Security payments barely pay his rent, and he needs help paying for his treatment.

He has started a Web site, <http://kcwalk.com/home.htm>, which tells Keith's inspiring story and accepts contributions.

Despite the injury, Keith maintains a positive attitude. "I'm going to walk," he said. "I can feel the muscles. It's just a question of when."



Keith Concar takes a break from therapy to play his guitar. Photos courtesy of projectwalk.org.