

Back to sales career after brain injury

Todd Pfannenstien, age 41 of Oak Grove, was out for a spin on his four-wheeler on a chilly night in November 2004 when he slid into the ditch. As he tried to pull the vehicle out, he fell and was cut in the leg with a tree branch. Severely injured and bleeding, he lay for hours in the cold, hovering near death. A passerby discovered him the next morning and called for help.

Medical personnel worked frantically, opening up his frozen body to warm his organs and try to revive him. A priest performed last rites.

“They were preparing me for the worst,” said Todd's wife, Cindy. And then a miracle: Todd's heart began beating again.

The accident left Todd with brain trauma and other injuries. After more than a year of physical rehabilitation, he sought help in getting back to work. His brain injury brought short-term memory loss, and he knew he couldn't return to his former sales job which required extensive multi-tasking.

“Todd said, 'I'm not going to be able to work,'” Cindy recalled. “He was so depressed, and he became very introverted.”

In early 2006, Todd turned to Opportunity Partners in Anoka County, where staff worked with him on perfecting his resume, filling out applications and polishing interviewing skills.

Eventually, John's Auto Parts in Blaine - a company that Todd had worked at earlier in his career - offered Todd a part-time sales job on a trial basis. “They were willing to give him a chance,” Cindy said.



With Opportunity Partners' help, Todd Pfannenstien was hired back at a former employer following a devastating brain injury.

Opportunity Partners' job coach Karen Frauly accompanied Todd to work at first, helping him learn to compensate for his brain injury by teaching him to write everything down and to ask co-workers for help when needed. “She seems to really care about him,” Cindy added. “That helps us a lot, to know that someone thinks he has possibilities.”

Last spring, his company changed to a new computer system. “Todd was anxious and concerned about the new system and not entirely sure he could learn it,” Karen said. “He persevered, constantly working through the different screens in the system until he became proficient.”

Getting back to work - even part-time - was a turning point for Todd, Cindy said. “It just made a world of difference,” she said. “He has a schedule, he has a purpose.”

In October, Todd earned the “Achieving Your Dreams Award” from Opportunity Partners for his many accomplishments involving work and increased independence.