

Longtime Aurora coach raising funds for rehabilitation



By Jake Courtepatte

Almost one year to the day, Chris Speller will never forget where he was on April 30, 2017.

Having moved away from Aurora after 35 years just one month prior, the 60-year old was walking home around 10 p.m. to his new home in Port Stanley when he tripped over a tree root and fell thirty feet into a ridge between two tree trunks.

'From within the trees I shouted 'Help! help! I'm going to die,' but nobody came. It started to rain and I was feeling the cold. It had been a nice day, I was wearing sandals, shorts and a t-shirt.'

Close to two hours later, a volunteer firefighter was returning home from a call when he heard Speller's cries through his bathroom window, following the sounds to find Speller wedged between the trunks.

'I continued shouting, then around midnight I heard a voice 'Where are you?', to which I replied, 'I don't know.' I then heard 'don't worry we'll find you, you're in good hands.'

Rushed off in an ambulance around 2 a.m., it was the start of a long and arduous recovery for the healthy longtime soccer coach, one he continues to this day.

A key cog in the Aurora Youth Soccer Club wheel through coaching both minor boys and girls teams, as well as a serving member of the board, the executive club came together in organizing a fundraiser, set for this Saturday, to help offset costs of the recovery.

The 'Spellatchi Retro Dance Night' at DNA Bar and Lounge in Aurora will feature live music, a silent auction, door prizes, and even an all-you-can-eat buffet, organized through Speller's longtime connections in the Aurora soccer community.

Ever the Bridesmaid, a Toronto-based band and no strangers to the Aurora community, join a live DJ to keep guests on their feet.

Money raised will go towards Speller's spinal cord rehabilitation.

'I'm determined to walk the way I did before my accident and also kick a soccer ball again,' said Speller. 'These are just two of the many goals I have set myself.'

Walking again for the first time in late August, Speller returned to Aurora soon after.

It was through both Southlake Hospital and a private gym in Newmarket that Speller has slowly, but assuredly, found his feet again.

'I was going four times a week (to Southlake),' said Speller. 'Working hard, and I continued to recover, but unfortunately for me this program funded by OHIP only lasts for eight weeks. I was then eight months into what I was told would be a 24 month recovery process.'

'So far, I'd been recovering well, but after 24 months I'm told generally not much will change. So I'm sure you can understand these are critical months to me.'

He continues his recovery through the 'Walk it Off' program, a private gym specialized for such a case.

'While in London, I fortunately came across an advertisement for Walk It Off, a private gym in Newmarket specifically for people with spinal cord injuries,' said Speller. 'It took one visit and a chat with Heather and I knew this was where my rehab would continue.'

'Now in the private sector, without OHIP coverage, I continue my rehabilitation.'

For more information on the event, as well as purchasing tickets, email Speller at cjspeller@gmail.com. Tickets are \$25 each.