

Community rallies on the rink to raise thousands for Chris Hodgins



By Brock Weir

Chris and Cathy Hodgins now find joy in the little things.

This past Valentine's Day, the 34-year-old Aurora couple were overjoyed when Chris was finally able to move his finger again. It might have just been by the smallest of millimetres, but every sign of progress is an important milestone as they grapple with their 'new normal' after Chris's devastating Sea-Doo accident this past summer, which left him in a wheelchair with serious spinal cord injuries.

But they found an overwhelming amount of joy in things decidedly larger this Family Day when over 100 people from Aurora and beyond took over the ice at the Aurora Community Centre for Hockey for Hodge, a fundraiser which saw Chris and Cathy's friends and family rally friends of their own for a friendly tourney which raised over \$20,000 for the family to navigate their incredibly challenging new normal.

'Everyone is coming out and supporting us; this is the best community of people,' said Chris, watching the action from his wheelchair, just behind the boards of ACC2. 'Everyone who is playing, for the most part, is from this community or grew up here and it is just great.'

While the family has been spearheading a Go Fund Me campaign to help Chris get the resources he needs, they hit on the 'Hockey for Hodge' idea in December and the response from their networks was overwhelming.

'This was supposed to be a small event and it just blew up,' says Cathy. 'This will help tremendously. There is no insurance, so this is our financial support. Chris needs a lot of equipment to just even get started and without that kind of financial support behind us, it just makes life a lot more difficult for him, for me, and his daily way of life. These injuries are serious enough that he does require more sensitive equipment and this will make a huge difference to us in our day to day.'

The lives of the Hodgins family were changed forever on the Saturday of the Labour Day weekend when Chris' Sea-Doo fell on top of him and broke his neck and back.

He sustained a number of injuries to his internal organs and chest.

'He lost all his own blood and was breathing on his diaphragm most of the time,' recalls Cathy. 'They say just him making it to surgery - not only having surgery - was a miracle in itself. I said to the doctor after, 'People who have injuries like my husband, what's the outcome?' and he said to me, 'I don't normally get to operate on people like your husband. They are already gone by the time they get here.' As far as I'm concerned, he's already a miracle in himself and I am very proud of him. Every day is difficult, but one day at a time, we're making it.'

'He progresses, which is fantastic, but with his progression, it puts him into different wheelchairs. At first, they didn't even think we would be able to use an arm-controlled wheelchair; they thought he would have to use a sip-and-puff wheelchair where you have to blow into a straw to make it go back and forth. From there, he went to a head-controlled wheelchair and now we're trying to be

positive that he will recover enough to get into a hand-controlled wheelchair.?

Their goals for the future are to continue on with physiotherapy and see if he can simply gain some of his independence back.

Before his accident, Chris was a self-employed landscaper and actively involved in his circle and the wider community. Cathy says he's always been known as a very positive person and willing to lend a hand.

'My not being able to do anything is tough,' he says. 'I always have to have other people do stuff for me. People don't really have an idea of what goes on, but it's tough ' and a lot tougher than regular life.'

'At the end of the day, I just want him to be happy,' adds Cathy. 'His mobility doesn't make him happy or not, that doesn't deprive him, but we're just trying to find those things that make his life a little easier so we're comfortable in our new normal. We've learned to cherish every moment, every movement. I think a lot of times we take for granted the little things in life, just like feeding yourself or going to the bathroom yourself. It's really eye-opening just to be gratified to move my body every day knowing that he can't.

'He says, 'you just start to be grateful for the little things.' We find such joy in the little things. The other day, he moved his finger just the slightest little bit and it was the best Valentine's Day present in the world. It was just flickering and we were both ecstatic.'

For more on Chris and Cathy Hodgins and how to support their ongoing Go Fund Me campaign, visit gofundme.com/chris-hodgins039s-road-to-recovery.